

B.E.A.C.H. Highlights Issue of Marine Debris

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Beach Environmental Awareness Campaign Hawaii (B.E.A.C.H.) is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization concerned with bringing awareness and solutions to the problem of marine debris on Hawaii's beaches through environmental education, plastic reduction and litter prevention campaigns, and marine debris removal and research. BEACH inspires the community to get involved and help care for Hawaii's marine life seabirds, the ocean and environment. The non-profit was founded in 2006 by local residents, Suzanne Frazer and Dean Otsuki without seed money, grants, or degrees in marine biology.

Their first endeavor was to remove marine debris from the Waimanalo Bay Recreation Area. In 2008, they won the Living Reef Award, which is given to the organization that does the most to protect the reef.

According to Frazer, "We were the first organization in Hawaii to educate the public about why they should use reusable bags by linking a strong message about the harm plastic bags cause to sea turtles. We were able to get Kale's Natural Foods in the Hawaii Kai Shopping Centre to be the first grocery store in Hawaii to go plastic bag-free in early 2008.

Frazer continued, "Our plastic bag reduction campaign was launched on Earth Day, 2007 and since that time, reusable bags can be found everywhere. We were the first organization to promote the use of reusable bags and about eight weeks later it took off. We also supported the successful ban of plastic bags in Maui County and it was our campaign that helped get the bills starting in 2008 to ban plastic bags at the state level."

Their biggest struggle has been getting enough funds to support their campaigns on a larger scale. "We volunteer all our time, but in order to accomplish what we do, money is needed for this."

Their current campaign is the elimination of the plastic utensils people use with plate lunches, at the beach, and at picnics. Frazer explains that, “Marine life such as baby albatrosses have died from ingesting plastic forks. Plastic cutlery is one of the top 10 littered items on beaches. If everyone who ate out brought their own utensils with them, there wouldn’t be any more of these items in the environment.”

To help solve this problem, BEACH encourages people to carry a reusable bamboo set like the one featured on their website, b-e-a-c-h.org. The set contains chopsticks, knife, fork, and spoon in a cotton wrap that is easy to carry with you in your bag, car, or to put in a desk at work.

On Saturday, July 30th they are planning to show “Synthetic Sea Story” at Aina Haina Library at 3:00PM. The film is about marine debris and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Otsuki wants people to be aware that, “Marine debris is a big problem in Hawaii. Clearing marine debris from the ocean and beaches is important not just for restoring the natural beauty of beaches, but also for saving marine life. Birds and animals mistake trash such as plastic bags, cigarette lighters and bright colored plastic as food and may suffer from internal injury, intestinal blockage and then starvation. Dolphins, whales, sea turtles, sharks, seals and birds get caught in fishing nets, lines and other debris such as six-pack holders. Marine debris comes from both land-based and water-based sources. On land, rivers and streams can carry debris far from its source and out to the ocean. On the ocean, fishermen lose fishing nets, rope, and buoys while recreational boaters throw trash overboard thinking that it will just ‘disappear,’ when in fact, many types of debris can last in the ocean for centuries.”

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