



Stop Litter from Getting Carried Away

How to Reduce and Prevent Pollution from Reaching our Waterways

Litter isn't just ugly to look at: it can also add toxic contaminants to our waterways and be ingested by wildlife.

Plastic bags drifting in the wind, cigarette butts tossed out a car window, beverage bottles tossed along the side of the road, and an open motor oil container left in a parking lot... we've all seen it and wondered why someone would do these things. You might also agree that these things are unappealing to look at, but not everyone realizes that litter adds up to a big water quality problem for the Chesapeake Bay.

So how does this trash end up in the Chesapeake Bay? Here at NASA Langley, it is picked up by rainwater and washed into the nearest storm drain. From there, it goes on an express ride straight into the creeks behind LaRC's property and ultimately to the Chesapeake Bay. And we all know that the Chesapeake Bay is already stressed.

Rainwater can pick up all kinds of pollution as it flows across streets, sidewalks, and lawns. Any pollutants and litter picked up along the way have big impacts on our local water bodies by smothering aquatic plants and bottom-dwelling organisms, detracting from the area's beauty, adding toxic contaminants to the water, and harming wildlife. Worst of all, litter, especially plastics, takes a long time to break down – sometimes hundreds of years.

While NASA Langley has multiple trash receptacles in convenient locations, there are still incidents of litter pollution on Center. One of the most common sources of litter on Center is cigarette butts. Changing a common behavior, like littering, can start with you. To reduce litter, properly dispose of all trash, participate in recycling, and encourage those around you to do the same. Also consider participating in a volunteer cleanup with a friend or neighbor to remove trash from local rivers, streams, or beaches.

Although prevention is key, relying on public reporting can be effective as well. The LaRC Water Program team asks that you report any illegal dumping, pollution, or spills that could impact water quality or the environment. You can report your observations by calling Peter Van Dyke (4-7517) for non-emergencies or 911 from a Center phone (864-2222 from a cell phone) in the event of an emergency or a spill.

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the biggest components of the litter waste stream is plastic: shopping bags, straws and drink stirrers, food utensils, wrapping for food and consumer goods, and plastic drink bottles, cups, and lids. Notice anything in common with these items? It's a lot of single-use, disposable plastic.

A recent study from the University of Georgia estimated that 8 million metric tons of plastic trash enter the ocean every year. This is equivalent to putting five bags filled with plastic on every foot of coastline in the world.