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San Diego Coastkeeper and Surfrider Foundation Begin to See Trend in Beach Cleanup Data Collection

Second Year of Data Shows Plastics Continue to Dominate Debris Found on Local Beaches in 2008

San Diego, January 14, 2009 – Another year of marine debris data collected by San Diego Coastkeeper and Surfrider Foundation at monthly cleanups shows that plastics continue to be the dominant types of debris found littering San Diego County beaches. 93,968 pieces of plastic and items made of plastic or Styrofoam were collected by more than 3,600 volunteers. This marine debris not only trashes our beautiful beaches but has a negative impact on the Pacific Ocean.

Through their partnership over the past six years, San Diego Coastkeeper and the San Diego Chapter of Surfrider Foundation have been mobilizing volunteers at twice-monthly cleanups throughout the County from Imperial Beach to Oceanside. Beginning in January of 2007, the organizations decided to take the cleanups a step further and incorporated a data collection component. As research continues to show, there is an alarming amount of marine pollution that is entering the ocean from land, and the organizations felt it was important to document this debris to track trends, to educate the community about pollution prevent and to advocate for policy change.

Of the 2 ½ tons of trash removed in 2008, nearly 80 percent of the items were made of plastic. The top culprits that continue to plague our beaches are: cigarette butts and filters, Styrofoam, plastic food wrappers, plastic take out items (utensils, lids, straws and cups), plastic bottles and caps, plastic bags, and miscellaneous plastic items.

Once again, cigarette butts continue to be the top item found at local cleanups. The amount of butts collected at cleanups has decreased drastically since smoking bans have been implemented at most beaches throughout San Diego County but they still take the lead because of the large amount of cigarette butts littered on the streets that make their way to the beach through storm drains.

Plastics, especially “disposable” types, have become a growing problem for the marine environment. The major issue with plastics is they do not break down through the natural degradation process so they can stay in the marine environment for a long time where they are commonly mistaken for food by sea turtles, birds and fish. In addition, many types of marine life become entangled in marine debris, such as plastic bags and fishing gear.

With an estimated 80 percent of marine debris coming from land-based sources, Coastkeeper and Surfrider believe it’s important to organize these cleanups to give the community members an opportunity to stop this trash from entering the ocean and at the same time educate the participants about the importance of pollution prevention. Individuals can have a positive impact on the ocean by making small changes in their everyday activities such as bringing reusable bags to the grocery store instead of using plastic bags, or eliminating their use of single-use water bottles by replacing them with a reusable one.

For more information about San Diego Coastkeeper and the San Diego Chapter of Surfrider Foundation monthly beach cleanups or to view the 2008 data please visit www.sdcoastkeeper.org or www.surfriderSD.org.

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San Diego Coastkeeper: *San Diego Coastkeeper protects the region’s bays, beaches, watersheds and ocean for the people and wildlife that depend on them. We balance community outreach, education, and advocacy to promote stewardship of clean water and a healthy coastal ecosystem. Dedicated to the belief that we all have a right to clean water, Coastkeeper is the largest professional organization dedicated solely to the monitoring and protection of San Diego’s coastal areas and waterways. Beginning in 2007, Coastkeeper started its Marine Debris Campaign to reduce marine pollution through education and policy change.*

Surfrider Foundation: *The Surfrider Foundation is a non-profit grassroots organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of our world’s oceans, waves and beaches. Founded in 1984 by a handful of visionary surfers in Malibu, California, the Surfrider Foundation now maintains over 50,000 members and 80 chapters worldwide. To raise awareness of the plastic pollution issue and help find solutions, Surfrider has started a “Rise Above Plastics” campaign. One of the first action items of the campaign is to slow the consumption of “disposable” plastic by encouraging people to use reusable water bottles every day and use cloth bags when shopping.*