



Connecticut Fund
for the Environment

Save the Sound®

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International Coastal Cleanup Day 2019: Large turnout, tiny trash

An estimated 1,000+ volunteers turn out for dozens of cleanups across Connecticut

NEW HAVEN, CONN. – Save the Sound staff and a thousand volunteers were spread across coastlines and riverbanks from Greenwich to New London, and inland to Torrington, on Saturday to help local organizers (“Cleanup Captains”) coordinate and run 35 cleanups in Connecticut’s contribution to International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) Day. ICC is an annual effort founded by Ocean Conservancy in 1986 that brings together more than a million volunteers across nearly every U.S. state and 100 countries to remove trash from coastlines around the world. Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound has been the Connecticut Coordinator for the annual cleanup since 2002.

Saturday was the peak of Save the Sound’s cleanup season, which kicked off with a pair of cleanups on August 8 and will continue through October. Data from International Coastal Cleanup Day efforts is still being tabulated, but two themes emerged throughout the day: large crowds, and lots of what Ocean Conservancy calls “tiny trash”—small pieces of plastic, glass, or foam measuring less than 2.5cm. As in 2017 and 2018, early results indicate that cigarette butts were once again the most common piece of trash recovered this year.

“We are so grateful to all of the volunteers who turned out this year—many of whom came for the first time or brought someone else for their first cleanup,” **said Soundkeeper Bill Lucey**. “What we accomplish together during the International Coastal Cleanup has a critical, focused effect on water quality in Long Island Sound. I’m looking forward to seeing the numbers from this year—the data we get from this effort helps to inform our efforts and those of other local and state environmental advocates, so we’ll be looking for totals and trends.”



While there were a number of the unusual finds that volunteers have come to expect from the event—such as a fidget spinner, barnacle-encrusted buoy, and a message in a bottle—familiar items like snack wrappers, plastic containers, and cigarette butts continue to be the primary scourge of Connecticut beaches and riverbanks.

“One of the things I heard from repeat volunteers this year was how much cleaner several of the beaches were,” **said ecological communications specialist Anthony Allen.** “We seem to be trending in the right direction, but the one thing you can still reliably find almost anywhere you look is cigarette butts, which, thanks to their lightweight plastic filters, are some of the most toxic and transportable things we could be leaving near our waterways. Along with other tiny trash, they are one of the most difficult things to remove from the ocean once they find their way to it—so anything we can do to intercept them is a great service to the health of our waterways.”

Plastics, glass, and other debris threaten the safety of beachgoers and boaters, and the lives of birds and marine wildlife. Cigarette butts and other plastics pose additional danger when they break down into microplastics. Microplastics (plastic particles less than 5mm), which can be found in every ocean globally, are easily absorbed into the food chain and were found in humans for the first time in 2018.



“The crowds we saw this year were incredibly heartening,” **said Allen.** “It’s really a testament to the dedication of our local Cleanup Captains who invest their time and energy to get the word out. We also have to thank our official cleanup sponsor, Subaru of New England—they were a tremendous help in extending our reach across the coastline and into inland communities this year.”

Save the Sound-affiliated cleanups will be held throughout September and October. All are welcome to explore a list of public cleanup sites and register at <https://www.savethesound.org/iccregistration>.

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