

2023

Beach Cleanup Annual Report

Working Towards a Plastic-Free Future



John Suhar



Contents

03 Introduction

04 National Overview

05 The Better Beach Alliance

06 Cleanup Database

07 2023 Program Results

10 Regional Stories

24 Science and Policy

25 Perils of Single-Use Plastic Foodware

27 Clearing the Tables (and Our Beaches)
of Single-Use Foodware

29 Conclusion



Introduction

The Surfrider Foundation's Plastic Pollution Initiative aims to protect our ocean from the harm caused by plastic pollution, including advocating for the reduction of single-use plastics. This includes eliminating single-use plastics at the source, switching to more sustainable reusable options, and ensuring that all remaining plastic is recycled rather than being burned or ending up in landfills and the environment. Surfrider's Plastic Pollution Initiative also features both programmatic and policy work. The policy arm focuses on [campaign](#) efforts, which have led to hundreds of [successful plastic pollution reduction laws](#). The programmatic aspects include Surfrider's Ocean Friendly Restaurants program, which recognizes direct action to decrease single-use plastics, and the Better Beach Alliance Beach Cleanup program, which is a critical effort to reduce the amount of plastic ending up in the ocean.

Beach cleanups are an integral part of the Surfrider Foundation, as our network has been hosting cleanups for decades. Last year's data shows that we're continuing to improve and having even more of an impact with each cleanup. While the recorded number of cleanup events decreased compared to the previous year, the number of volunteers at cleanups, the total weight of trash removed, and the total number of individual items picked up increased. This means that Surfrider cleanups are generating a more significant positive impact than ever

before. One of the more jarring statistics is the number of individual items picked up, with an additional 200,000 pieces of trash removed from our coasts compared to 2022 – most of which were plastic. So, while we're making bigger strides with our cleanup efforts, the flow of trash onto our beaches remains an exponentially bigger issue that we must continue to work together to resolve.

The 2023 Beach Cleanup Report not only highlights Surfrider's cleanup efforts, but also reviews how plastic impacts various coastal regions and reveals the items most often collected during Surfrider beach cleanups. This report explores single-use foodware, the growing yet unnecessary dependence on it, the threat it poses to our ocean, and how our policy and programmatic activists are tackling this issue head on.

Surfrider's Beach Cleanup program focuses on ocean and coastal trash, primarily caused by rampant plastic pollution, through organized community action. The program also supports public education efforts, provides the underlying data needed to bolster our plastic pollution advocacy campaigns, and demonstrates the effectiveness of the policies we've worked to pass. Beach cleanups inspire volunteers to become grassroots activists who work towards positive, pragmatic changes within their communities and beyond. For more information on our beach cleanup data, visit Surfrider's [beach cleanup database](#).

2023 Program Highlights



While the recorded number of cleanup events decreased compared to the previous year, the number of [volunteers at cleanups](#), the [total weight of trash removed](#), and the [total number of individual items picked up](#) increased. This means that [Surfrider cleanups are generating a more significant positive impact than ever before](#).

National Overview



The Better Beach Alliance

The Surfrider Foundation engaged the support and commitment of our surf industry partner, REEF, to establish the Better Beach Alliance in 2018. The original mission statement of the Better Beach Alliance (BBA) was to drive beach cleanup data collection with the ultimate goal of creating lasting protection for our ocean, waves, and beaches through the advancement of policy at the local, state, and federal levels to cut off plastic pollution at the source. Six years later, the BBA has served as a powerful platform for innovation, learning, and community collaboration. The program invites individuals and businesses to take action and join in our shared

mission of coming together and contributing to coastal conservation. We continue to evolve and improve our national beach cleanup program with the support of our national program sponsor, REEF.

The program invites individuals and businesses to take action and join in our shared mission of coming together and contributing to coastal conservation.



© All Above Images: Ridge Benben

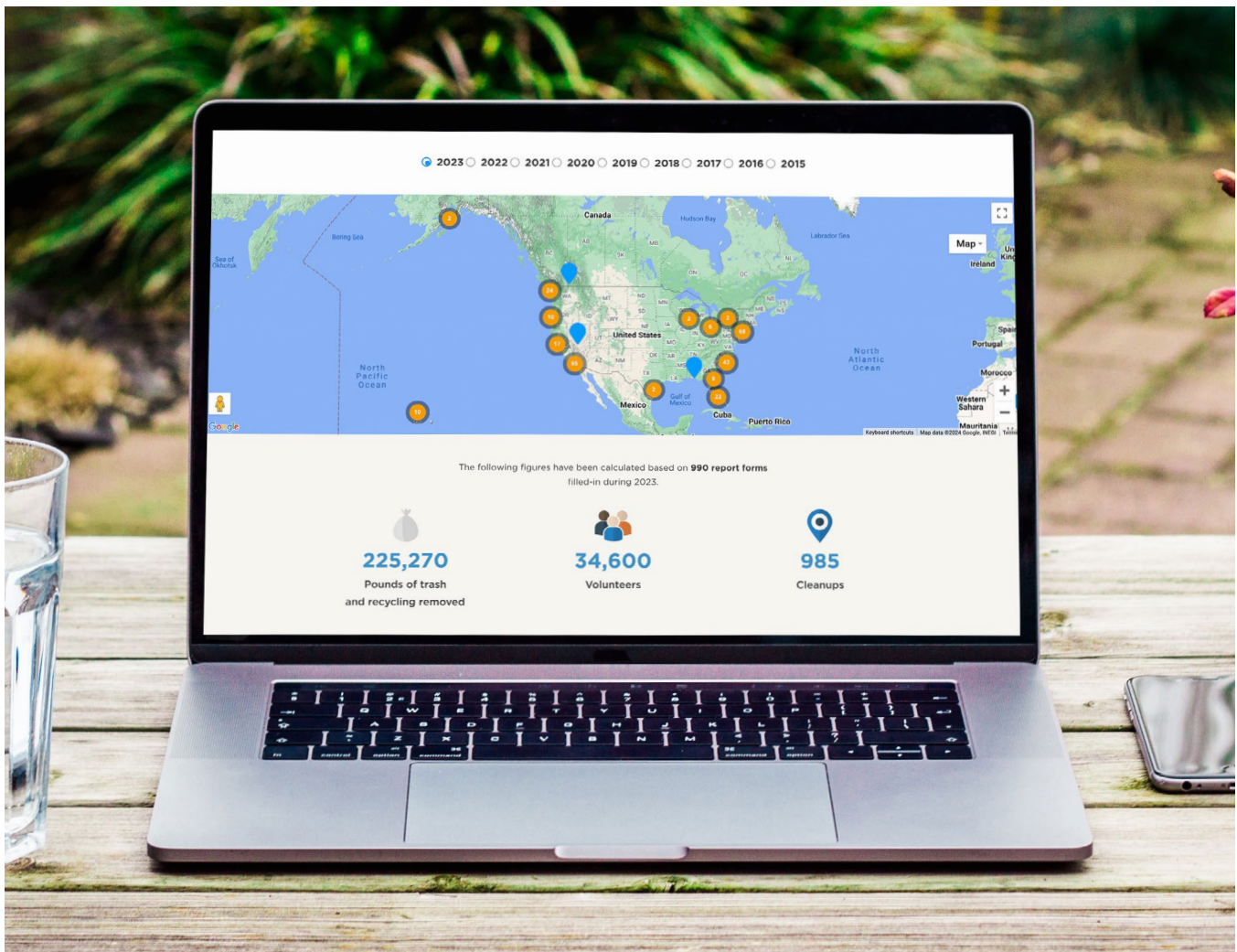
Cleanup Database

Surfrider’s beach cleanup database, created in 2019, elevates the Beach Cleanup program by allowing easy data reporting across our network of chapters and student clubs. It helps to amplify the work of Surfrider staff and volunteers by providing an accessible platform to showcase our collective impacts. The database serves as an excellent visual aid for understanding the geographic reach of Surfrider cleanups and easily identifying commonly found items.

As Surfrider’s Beach Cleanup program continues to grow, so does the amount of people using the beach cleanup database to store their cleanup data. In 2023, as a result of increasing usage and with the support of the Better Beach Alliance, Surfrider was able to invest in the database and

make upgrades to accommodate our growth – providing our database with the capacity needed to capture cleanup data from across the country. We are incredibly grateful and excited that we can continue to grow and support our beach cleanup activists, who work tirelessly to record their findings and educate their communities about the prevalence of plastic pollution on our beaches and coasts.

The database serves as an excellent visual aid for understanding the geographic reach of Surfrider cleanups and easily identifying commonly found items.



2023 Program Results

Together, 34,600 volunteers removed over 225,000 pounds of trash and recyclables from the environment across 985 cleanups to ultimately reduce the amount of plastic pollution flowing into our ocean. We increased our volunteer engagement,

the number of items removed from the environment, and the total weight of trash picked up compared to the previous year. This growth in key metrics means that each Surfrider beach cleanup is having more of an impact than ever before.



225,270
Pounds Of Trash Collected



985
Total Cleanups



746,921
Total Items Collected



34,600
Volunteers Engaged



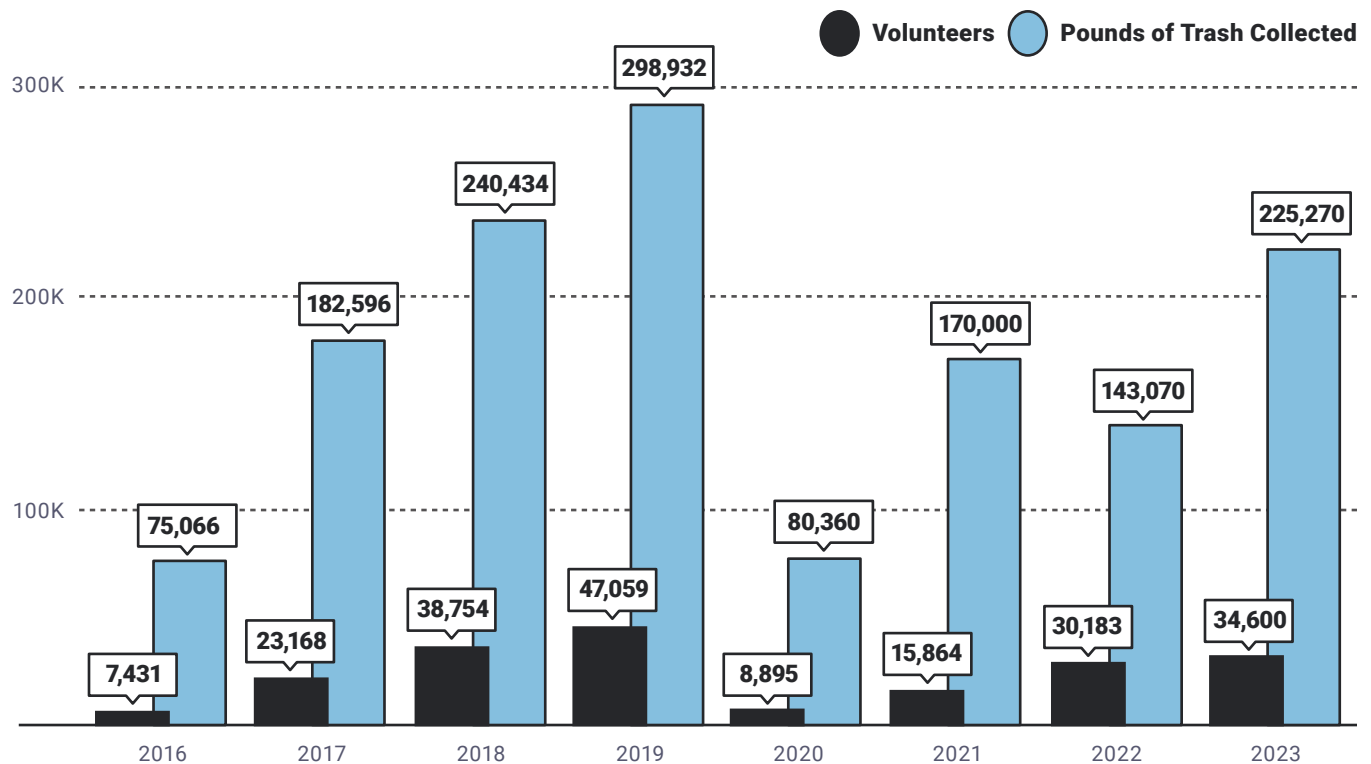
1,887
Volunteer Hours



1,376
Miles of Beach Cleaned

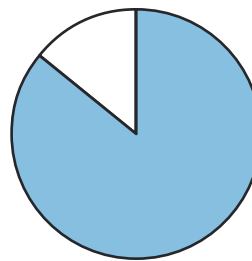
We increased our volunteer engagement, the number of items removed from the environment, and the total weight of trash picked up compared to the previous year.

Beach Cleanup Program Growth

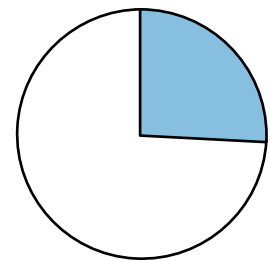


A Closer Look

Nine of the top 10 items found during cleanups were made of plastic, and over 85% of all items collected were plastic. About 15.1% of all items collected were small* plastic fragments, and 13.7% were plastic large** plastic fragments. This means that out of the 746,921 items found during beach cleanups, nearly one third of them (28.8%) were plastic fragments. These figures confirm once again, year after year, that plastic pollution is everywhere. We cannot beach clean our way out of this mess without large-scale legislative interventions and industry innovations to rapidly shift away from single-use plastic products.



86%
Of All Items Collected
Were Single-Use Plastics



26%
Of All Items Collected
Were Cigarette Butts

Cigarette butts continue to be the #1 polluted item on our beaches.

Top Ten Items Collected



190,654
Cigarette Butts



61,638
Small Plastic Fragments



57,838
Large Plastic Fragments



51,600
Small Foam Fragments



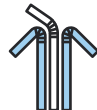
44,183
Large Foam Fragments



41,916
Plastic Food Wrappers



31,542
Plastic Bottle Caps/Rings



18,444
Plastic Straws

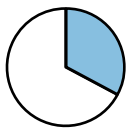


15,867
Paper/Wood Fragments

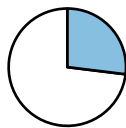


14,217
Plastic Bottles

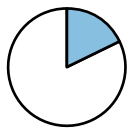
Broad Usage Categories



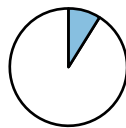
33%
Fragments



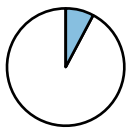
27%
Smoking Waste



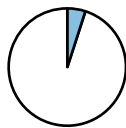
18%
Packaging



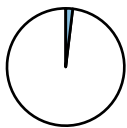
9%
Foodware



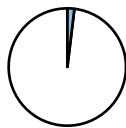
8%
Other



3%
Consumer Goods



1%
Fishing Items



1%
Sanitary & Medical

Finding Fragments

29%

Of All Items Collected
Were Plastic Fragments

14%

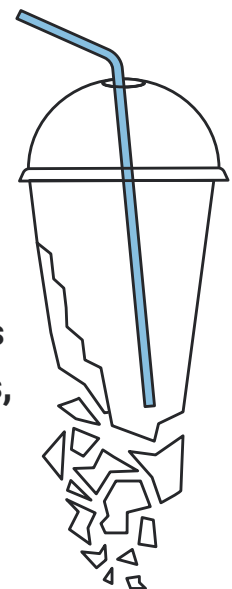
Large Plastic
Fragments

15%

Small Plastic
Fragments

Out of the 746,921 items found at beach cleanups, nearly one third of them were plastic fragments.

*Small Fragments: Smaller than a dime
**Large Fragments: Larger than a dime

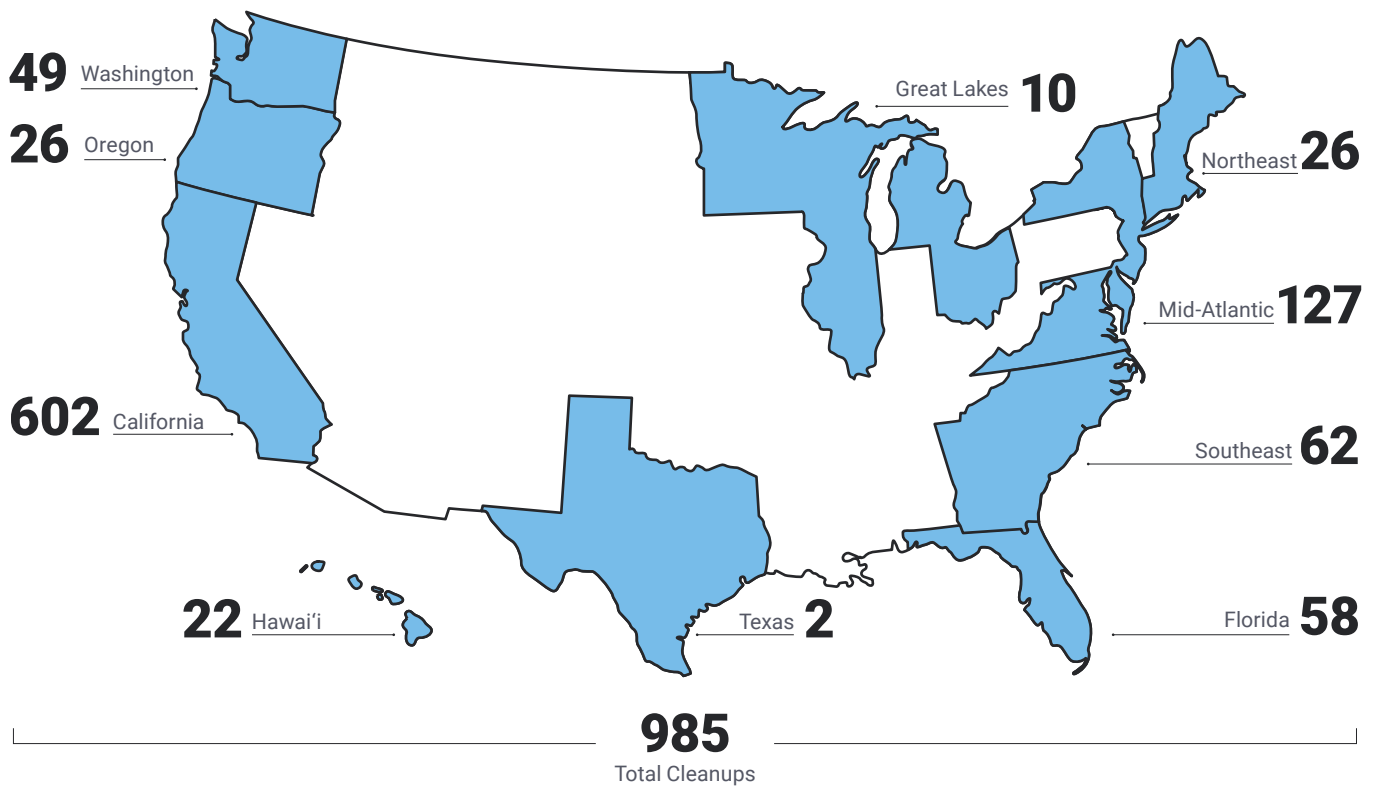


Regional Impacts

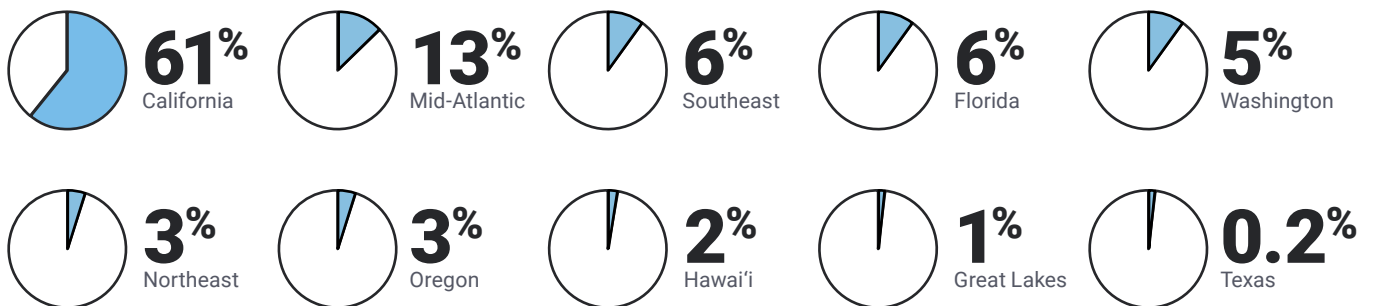
The Surfrider Foundation's grassroots network of chapters and student clubs serves as the first response to local threats in our coastal communities. With more than 200 chapters and student clubs nationwide, Surfrider volunteers work within their communities to create and lead meaningful change. In the pages that follow, we caught up with regional Surfrider leaders to learn more about the impacts of their work in 2023.

With more than 200 chapters and student clubs nationwide, Surfrider volunteers work within their communities to create and lead meaningful change.

Cleanups by Region



Percent of Total Cleanups by Region



Regional Stories



California

Ventura County

With 12 atmospheric rivers hitting Ventura County in early 2023, gathering our community was essential to removing the enormous volume of debris left on our beaches – including large items like appliances, car bumpers, and mattresses. The need for water quality monitoring and ongoing debris cleanup persisted throughout the year. Coming into an El Niño event for the latter half of the year, another major storm hit to mark the end of 2023. Surfrider Ventura had to rely again on our dedicated community of volunteers in the wake of the storm.

Surfrider Ventura has three public cleanup programs that run monthly: Ormond Beach and Wetlands, C-Street, and Respect the Rincon Parkway. We also worked to expand our corporate-sponsored cleanups, hosting 14 private cleanups at various beaches with corporate partners in 2023. As always, Surfrider supports and encourages

solo cleanups as an easy way to get involved for the days we aren't on the sand as a chapter.

In 2023, our 2,185 volunteers were able to remove 22,570 pounds of trash from beaches across Ventura County. On average, that's about ten pounds of trash per volunteer. We reached over 160 cleanup hours across 76 cleanups at 10 locations, with Rincon Parkway having the most cleanups for the year. Our data was collected from a variety of solo, public, and private cleanups. Astoundingly, our cleanup programs saw a 54% increase in volunteer engagement with 770 more volunteers present than in 2022. In 2023, we brought in 770 more volunteers than the year prior. With all the new faces, it's no wonder that Surfrider Ventura was able to make big impacts.

– Ally Alejo, Surfrider Ventura Beach Cleanup Coordinator

Astoundingly, our cleanup programs saw a 54% increase in volunteer engagement with 770 more volunteers present than in 2022.



Los Angeles County

The Beach Cleanup program functions as a gateway to expanding awareness of the plastic pollution problem threatening our ocean and coasts. Surfrider Los Angeles, along with the South Bay and Long Beach Chapters, is tasked with the unique challenges of mitigating coastal pollution in the most populous county in the Surfrider Foundation network.

In 2023, over 2,000 volunteers in Los Angeles tackled 53 cleanups, removing over 3,500 pounds of trash to ultimately reduce the flow of plastic pollution into our ocean. Through our collaborative data collection process at each of our cleanups, we visually bring awareness to the scale and pervasiveness of the plastic pollution problem in our county of over 9.8 million local residents. Our beach cleanups were able to activate Angelenos to get involved in protecting our coast through deeper chapter involvement as volunteers and through sponsorship revenue to support our chapter programming.

Though cigarette butts and foam are plastics, commonly, they aren't thought of as such. As 91% of all trash items

we recorded were plastic, and with nearly half of those plastic items being solely cigarette butts and foam, we dove into some data on the plastics found that were not EPS foam or cigarette butts. We found that more than a quarter of all these other plastic items were from restaurant to-go foodwares. Just under half were plastic bottles or caps and other food wrappers/packaging. The remaining pieces were miscellaneous plastic fragments.

Los Angeles County, with heavy industrial zones directly adjacent to major waterways, generates a much more significant amount of waste due to its geographic scale and population density. Despite that, California's legislative efforts at the city, county, and state levels are also some of the most aggressive in the country in an effort to mitigate our pollution and carbon footprints. Surfrider LA hopes to leverage our influence on these policies to affect further change in production and waste management practices in our county and state to better protect our ocean, waves, and beaches.

– Chanae Owens, Surfrider Los Angeles
Beach Cleanup Coordinator



San Diego

Surfrider San Diego and San Diego Coastkeeper partner each year to host volunteer-powered beach and park cleanups across San Diego County to address trash along our coasts and inland waterways. In addition to hosting approximately seven public cleanup events each month, both organizations host special cleanup events and encourage individuals to conduct their own solo cleanups. Our co-led Beach Cleanup program has removed 147,193 pounds from our beaches and waterways since 2007.

In 2023, our beach cleanups empowered 11,264 volunteers to remove 19,216 pounds of trash from our parks and coastline. Additionally, they collected data on 300,002 separate pieces of trash. Based on data collected from 268 separate cleanup events, this report provides a detailed picture of the waste we found and for the first time since we started collecting data in 2007, cigarette

For the first time since we started collecting data in 2007, cigarette butts were no longer the top item found at cleanup events. In 2023, plastic fragments topped the list.

butts were no longer the top item found at cleanup events. In 2023, plastic fragments topped the list, surpassing cigarette butts by a significant margin. Surfrider San Diego is proud and thankful for the long-standing partnership with San Diego Coastkeeper and their shared dedication to safeguarding San Diego’s iconic coastline.

– Gabriel Racca, Surfrider San Diego
Beach Cleanup Coordinator



© Ridge Benben

© Ridge Benben

Pacific Northwest

In my first year as the Oregon Regional Manager, I've been in total awe of the dedicated folks that get out there to our beach cleanups. The weather on the Oregon coast is often rainy, windy, and can be downright miserable, even in the summertime. Despite this, we have an amazing community of activists, artists, kids, retirees, valley dwellers, and those with a couple of free hours who choose to get down to the beach and do their part to rid our waters and coastline of debris, helping to make Oregon that much more beautiful. I feel very fortunate to be a part of this community and to support the incredible chapter leadership teams that make these cleanups happen.

During my first week on the job, I joined Surfrider Portland for their bi-annual Oswald West Action Day. The Portland Chapter joins forces with Oregon State Parks, Trailkeepers of Oregon, and Cape Falcon Marine Reserve for a day of stewardship at their "adopted" beach, Short Sands, and the access trail that winds through Oswald West State Park to get there. Each Action Day consists of a beach cleanup, trail maintenance, and a project to improve beach access

– a "choose your own adventure" to show your love for this special place. I loved that random kayakers in the cove joined our cleanup efforts, bringing in derelict crab pots, golf balls, and floats.

Inland, Surfrider Portland hosts Green Streets cleanups, partnering with local eco-conscious businesses to clean the blocks surrounding their buildings. In 2023, volunteers collected 5,675 cigarette butts from Portland's streets! That's a lot of plastic and toxins prevented from entering our waterways and ending up in the ocean!

Likewise, Surfrider Newport, on the central Oregon coast, has diversified their cleanup efforts and jointly adopted a mile of highway with the Oregon Hang Gliders Association. Highway 101 runs parallel to the coast, just steps from the beach in this area. A very dedicated handful of volunteers clean up this stretch of road twice a year, yielding nearly a third of their total yearly trash poundage! Over two cleanups, 16 volunteers collected an astounding 1,425 pounds of trash – and in the rain, no less!



Both the Coos Bay and Portland chapters collected the most trash in a single day on July 5th, cleaning up after careless partiers. Despite a longtime fireworks ban on all Oregon beaches, folks still come from all over to do exactly that on the holiday, leaving behind plastic elements and toxic chemicals. Each year, Surfrider Coos Bay puts out a large barrel at Bastendorff Beach to encourage visitors to dispose of their trash properly. Despite this, volunteers collected 300 pounds of trash from the beach after the holiday. The following week, Surfrider Portland hosted a cleanup on Ross Island in the Willamette River and worked with local rental businesses to provide kayaks and SUP boards for volunteers to use. A popular spot for Independence Day celebrations, volunteers collected 475 pounds of trash, preventing it from entering the river and flowing downstream.

One of my favorite experiences was working with Sunnyside Environmental School. In September, the Portland-based students traveled to coastal Seaside, where North Coast and Portland Chapter volunteers met them for a field trip to kick off their “Year of the Ocean.” In addition to water quality testing and sea otter art, the students conducted a beach cleanup and tracked each item they collected. We discussed the importance of data collection and how we use it for advocacy.

In total, Oregon chapters coordinated 34 cleanups in 2023, turning out 831 volunteers and removing 5,130 pounds of debris!

Their most found items included 74 cigarette butts, 62 plastic food wrappers, 56 plastic bottle caps, 44 plastic pieces, 20 yards of rope, 15 toys (including Scrabble and other game pieces, and a bubble wand).

All Surfrider Oregon chapters work with breweries (Oregon’s famous for them!) to source spent grain bags from the brewing process to use at cleanups to avoid creating more plastic waste. This is just one example of the many connections chapter leaders have cultivated over the years and continue to lean on to strengthen our work.

In total, Oregon chapters coordinated 34 cleanups in 2023, turning out 831 volunteers and removing 5,130 pounds of debris! This is an incredible feat and a massive win for our ocean, waves, and beaches!

– Kaia Hazard, Oregon Regional Manager



Portland

To celebrate Earth Day this year, Surfrider Portland put on our annual Oswald West State Park Action Day on May 6. It was a weekend packed with great work, good food, and cold beers. Those who just couldn't wait to get started camped out at Nehalem Bay State Park on Friday, following a group dinner at The [Salmonberry](#), a hyper-local restaurant in Wheeler.

Early on Saturday morning, under a low mist, a small group gathered to do a pre-action day tidepool exploration, guided by Angela Whitlock from [North Coast Land Conservancy](#). We saw sea stars, crabs, and even three species of nudibranch! Angela showed us how to explore the tidepools carefully and taught us about the many different species that live in the rocky intertidal zone of the [Cape Falcon Marine Reserve](#).

As the clouds burned off and the sun came out, a group of 65 volunteers assembled to show some love to this heavily used but beloved trail, beach, and surf spot. This year, we partnered with [Trailkeepers of Oregon](#) to block off "user-made" trails and [Oregon State Parks](#) to help with a sign removal project. Of course, we were also on the beach, picking up lots of microplastics, cans, and foam. We even had some last-minute additions, as a couple of kayakers

saw us assembled in the parking lot and wanted to join. They used their kayaks to pick up debris floating in the cove (think lots of golf balls and buoys). It was awesome to have a marine component to the cleanup this year!

We removed 134 pounds of trash from the beach and ocean and were rewarded with a gorgeous afternoon and some ice-cold brews back at the camp, thanks to our friends at [Public Coast Brewing](#). Public Coast also donated spent grain bags (from their brewing process) to pack the trash out, as well as some sweet merch for the annual raffle, along with sick shirts from Buni Boards, and fun bags made of upcycled kites from [Looptworks](#). Volunteers camped out again on Saturday night.

As we head into summer and the number of visitors to the Oregon Coast only grows, we hold Oswald West Action Day to help lessen the impact of increased use on this little North Coast gem and create an ethos of stewardship that can go hand in hand with recreation. This wouldn't be possible without our awesome partners and amazing volunteers! A huge thank you to everyone who made this event happen!

– Surfrider Portland



Great Lakes

In 2023, Surfrider Northern Ohio hosted monthly cleanups on Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River. The Cleveland-based crew had over 160 volunteers at 10 cleanup events during the summer months. Members, like Kim Haney at [Sundog Yoga](#), hosted donation-based yoga sessions prior to our cleanups to help raise awareness and funds to benefit the local chapter. In total, we removed over 994 pounds of trash and 450 invasive frogbit plants from our northern Ohio waterways!

In order to accomplish our goals of clean water and healthy beaches for everyone, the Northern Ohio Chapter partnered with organizations like [Canalway Partners](#), which hosts [RiverSweep](#), an annual cleanup event on the Cuyahoga River and some of Cleveland's recreational trails that link citizens to our important aquatic natural resources. The Canalway Partners encouraged Surfrider Northern Ohio and our friends at [Argonaut](#) and [TrashFish](#) to lead the amphibious team by advising members to bring their canoes, kayaks, and SUPs to clean the Cuyahoga River. This water-based cleanup crew removed over 500 pounds of trash from the river at this event.

The team also collaborated with [Old Woman Creek NERR](#), a dedicated State Nature Preserve managed by the [ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves](#) in Huron, Ohio, in September 2023. ODNR trained Northern Ohio Surfriders to paddle out on SUPs and kayaks to identify and remove

the invasive and fast-growing European Frog-bit plants from the waterway. ODNR states that the European Frog-bit is not native to Ohio but is common at landscaping supply stores for use in backyard ponds and general landscaping. This invasive plant is dangerous to natural waterways because it forms dense mats on the surface of slow-moving waters like bayous, backwaters, and wetlands. When these mats of frog-bit form, they can reduce oxygen and light in the water and can choke out native plants, altering food and habitat for ducks and fish. The team successfully removed over 450 frog-bit florets in the campaign. The Northern Ohio Surfrider team plans to support this campaign in 2024. [Read the full story here.](#)

Lastly, it was brought to our attention in October that Lake Erie has a considerable erosion issue at the [City of Mentor's nature preserve, Mentor Lagoons](#). The lagoons wetlands are some of the few riverine marshes still surviving along Lake Erie's shore, and the uplands support the largest unbroken bluff forest in Northeast Ohio – home to one of the few point break waves on Lake Erie. The lack of ice cover this winter and increasingly strong precipitation events, along with high lake levels, are accelerating natural rates of erosion. The Surfrider team is actively engaged with the City of Mentor to help maintain the integrity of this important surf spot on the North Shore. [Link to full campaign.](#)

– Dave Kaminski, Surfrider Northern Ohio,
Marketing Coordinator



Northeast

This past April, Surfrider chapters from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut hosted their first coordinated Northeast region-wide beach cleanup. Using the slogan, “Get Your Hands Dirty and Our Beaches Clean,” the chapters pulled off an extremely successful cleanup spanning four states, activating over 100 volunteers and collecting over 200 pounds of trash. Despite cold and rainy conditions (and only one cleanup being canceled due to thunderstorms), volunteers showed up eager to work together and clean the beach. After the cleanup, Massachusetts and New Hampshire celebrated with an after-party held at Sunset Club, on Plum Island. This event sparked great conversations amongst the chapters, prepped them for more collaborative efforts across the region, and inspired them to host a similar event in 2024.

– Isabella DeFrancesco, Northeast Regional Manager

New Hampshire

In New Hampshire, we “dream of cleaner beaches,” and we did a great job of getting our hands dirty while keeping our beaches clean in 2023.

We picked up over 4,900 pieces of trash and debris from our beaches, weighing in at over 570 pounds. With 364 volunteers participating and 728 hours of total volunteer time, there was a lot of help. We could have done even more if given enough time and better weather conditions. As we reflect on 2023 several images come to mind. The crew endured freezing temperatures of -4F, snowstorms, torrential downpours, thunderstorms, blistering heat, and one or two simply beautiful seacoast days. Running outdoor activities in New England is always a roll of

We picked up over 4,900 pieces of trash and debris from our beaches, weighing in at over 570 pounds. With 364 volunteers participating and 728 hours of total volunteer time, there was a lot of help.



the dice, but we are a tough bunch and would rather be outside. It is all about the mission.

There were some great events in 2023. The spring kicked off with the All New England Beach Cleanup. This was a cool event where our Regional Manager, Isabella DeFrancesco, coordinated with other New England chapter leaders to run a beach cleanup on the same day, at the same time, at each of our favorite beaches. The cleanup was held in torrential rain and wind, but we still had over 70 volunteers attend. As our friend and Connecticut Chapter Lead Rachel Precious said, “There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing!” With that, we jumped into foul weather gear and pressed on. We have grit – and a bit of stubbornness too – and we got the job done. On that day, as the expression goes, “The Juice Was Worth The Squeeze!” We were stoked to remove 562 items, totaling 66 pounds of trash. We had some hot and humid beach cleanups over the summer, and as we cruised into fall, we turned things up with a ghoulish beach cleanup bash – ‘The Halloween Hang Ten.’ This cleanup features music, a surf contest, costumes, and plenty of candy. We had over 65 people and took no prisoners, removing 781 items totaling 85 pounds of trash.

In addition to chapter leadership, we have a tremendous amount of support from a couple of local businesses and clubs. Our friends at Loaded Question Brewery provide a place to hang and have been very supportive of our chapter activities. Our friends at NOBL Beverages have supported us at every one of our beach cleanups, no matter how bad (or nice) the weather. They have provided us with all kinds of great NOBL coffees and teas and kept us warm, cool, and caffeinated. There has never been a beach cleanup too daunting for them. We have also had several student groups (eco clubs and surf/service clubs) join us, and it has been great to see an army of young people show up. They are the future, and based on their commitment and desire to drive change, we are in good hands.

Every beach cleanup turns up something new. Sometimes it's something shocking, like hypodermic needles or vaping paraphernalia. But sometimes, it is funny, cool, and worth keeping around. So, in 2023, we definitely had some interesting finds. We found our mascot, a large plastic mountain gorilla we call "Furious George" – and he is just pissed off by beach pollution and marine debris! We found Barbie, who helps George with his mission. These two never miss a photo op. We also found a polo helmet, so if we ever see horses on the beach and want to go for a ride, we can



ride safely. We found a plastic Wonder Bread bag from the early 1980s. We found a foam Big Mac container that was removed from McDonald's supply chain in 1990. And finally, we found a "Benjamin," or a \$100 bill. Unfortunately, it was fake. Otherwise, it would have been a good donation to our beach cleanup bucket fund.

We may have set a high bar in 2023, but we are looking to reach over it in 2024.

– Chris Grippio, Chair, Surfrider New Hampshire



Maine

In August of 2023, Surfrider Maine partnered with Maine Island Trails Association (MITA) to host a cleanup on the remote Pond Cove Island in Roque Bluffs, Maine. Volunteers gathered on Saturday morning to be shuttled there by boat, prepared for a full day of sweeping the entire island.

Although the number of volunteers was small, they were mighty. The team cleared over 1,000 pounds of trash from the island in only a few hours. Although the island is mostly uninhabited the majority of the year, aside from the occasional camper, tons of trash had washed up from storms. Much of it consisted of materials from the commercial fishing industry. There was so much trash the boat needed to take multiple trips to and from the island to remove it! We found 211 plastic bottles, 33 plastic beach containers, 44 cans, 75 styrofoam buoys, 64 segments of fishing rope, and one massive fishing net weighing over 1,000 lbs.

The event was eye-opening for all the volunteers and led to the chapter deciding to expand its collaboration with MITA and host two remote island cleanups each summer. It is impactful, memorable, and a fantastic example of how much our work at Surfrider impacts our local communities.

– Surfrider Maine



Southeast

Bogue Banks

On November 15, 2023, Surfrider Bogue Banks teamed up with Greensboro Montessori School to clean up Radio Island. Seeing kids so eager to learn, take action, and help clean up was inspiring! Students not only picked up debris but also sorted through the litter they collected and tabulated data on their finds to characterize what categories of litter were most prevalent. We diverted over 100 pounds of litter from reaching the waterway, including 477 cigarette butts, 122 plastic food wrappers, and 147 bottles, 93 of which were plastic.

– Surfrider Bogue Banks Chapter

Charlotte

On International Coastal Cleanup Day in September, Surfrider Charlotte removed 45 pounds of litter from the trails and shoreline at Latta Nature Preserve. Our haul contained 67 cigarette butts, 42 yards of fishing line, 35 plastic bottles, 35 foam pieces, 30 plastic bottle caps, and a laptop.

The chapter has sourced burlap coffee bean bags from local roasters to avoid generating additional single-use plastic waste at our cleanups.

– Surfrider Charlotte



Outer Banks

Surfrider Outer Banks not only organizes beach cleanup events, but the chapter also administers the Adopt-a-Beach program for Dare County, North Carolina. As such, the chapter is responsible for assigning over 90 county beach accesses to adoptees, including individuals, organizations, and businesses. Adoptees commit to cleaning their access six times per year for two years, collecting cleanup data and entering it into Surfrider’s Beach Cleanup Database, taking and sharing photos from their cleanups, and donating to the Surfrider Foundation. The chapter works with the local towns to print and install signs at these access points, recognizing the adoptee’s stewardship. With the help of so many community members, much more litter is removed from our Outer Banks beaches than what the chapter could accomplish on its own.

– Surfrider Outer Bank

With the help of so many community members, much more litter is removed from our Outer Banks beaches than what the chapter could accomplish on its own.



Texas

On September 23, 2023, Surfrider Galveston gathered with the Texas General Land Office, Clean Galveston, Inc., the Park Board of Trustees, and several local organizations to provide supplies and guidance to the public for that day's island-wide cleanup. On this day, just in the one-block radius of our booth, volunteers picked up over 750 cigarette butts. Galveston Surfrider has collected over 262,800 cigarette butts from the city's beaches, seawall, downtown, and miscellaneous litter pickups since 2020.

In 2023, with a grant from Clean Galveston, Inc., our chapter was able to purchase and install additional cigarette butt receptacles, as well as advertising space to increase awareness of cigarette butt litter. We secured space at two highly desirable locations, one on the seawall

Galveston Surfrider has collected over 262,800 cigarette butts from the city's beaches, seawall, downtown, and miscellaneous litter pickups since 2020

and one downtown. The message to "Hold On To Your Butt" is now potentially reaching over 15,000 people per day, according to data from TXDoT and Visit Galveston. That is an astounding and encouraging number.

– Rob Glover and Sarah Burgess, Surfrider Galveston



Student Clubs

Surfrider student clubs had another impactful year – here are some highlights from a few of our student clubs and their cleanup work in 2023.

University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez & Dr. Heriberto Domenech High School: Puerto Rico: In November 2023, The University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez and Dr. Heriberto Domenech High School Surfrider Clubs collaborated on a beach cleanup and mangrove planting event at Crash Boat Beach in Aguadilla. The student clubs also worked with the local Surfrider chapter and over 10 community partners to increase public awareness and participation. This event highlighted the importance of marine debris prevention, coastal resilience, and community-led action.

Loyola Marymount University: Los Angeles, CA: With over 100 student participants, the Loyola Marymount University Surfrider Club collaborated with the Los Angeles Surfrider Chapter in January of 2023 to clean up ~160 pounds of trash off of Venice Beach. Surfrider student club

and chapter collaborations are a valuable way to build community, foster cross-collaboration, and support the next generation of coastal defenders.

Saint Thomas Aquinas High School Student Club: Fort Lauderdale, FL: The St. Thomas Aquinas High School Surfrider Club received 1st place in Surfrider’s inaugural 2023 Club Cleanup Competition for the most trash collected. The STA Club logged a total of 680.61 pounds of trash off of Hollywood Beach in March 2023. They also found a very large “ghost net” (a commercial fishing net that had been lost or discarded into the ocean) entangled with marine life. With help from local beach authorities, the ghost net was properly removed to prevent any further harm.

We are continually impressed by our student clubs and grateful for their commitment to protecting our ocean and coasts.

– Carolyn Curtin, Student Club Network Coordinator



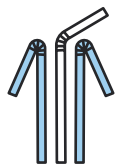
Science and Policy



Perils of Single-Use Plastic Foodware

If you've been out to eat or ordered food for takeout or delivery in the last few years, you've likely been given disposable plastic foodware. The COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on the restaurant industry and uncertainty about how the virus spread greatly increased the public's reliance on single-use plastic takeout items. Despite the fact that **98% of all U.S. takeout or delivery meals are consumed at home** or a workplace, where reusable cutlery is readily available, disposable plastic foodware use continues to be a growing threat to both our planet and to human health. New research comes out almost every week about the ways in which plastic pollution has infiltrated not just our ocean and coasts, but every part of the human body. Further, plastic production facilities contribute to cancer, asthma, and other diseases in the communities adjacent to such manufacturing plants. In contrast to pandemic-era concerns, reusable, non-toxic options are clearly the healthier choice. In this section, we explore the concerning issues with single-use plastic foodware, what steps Surfrider is taking to address this problem, and our vision for a more sustainable future.

Single-use foodware is consistently one of the top categories of items found littering our coasts and beaches.



63 Billion

Straws Used Annually in the United States



64,000

Individual Foodware Items Collected in 2023



10%

Of All Items Collected in 2023 Were Single-Use Foodware

What does it mean when we say "foodware"? Surfrider's **Ocean Friendly Restaurants (OFR)** program defines foodware as all items presented during a meal, including dinnerware, drinkware, silverware, and ramekins/containers. The Beach Cleanup program takes this even further by including napkins and takeout containers. For the purposes of this report, when we mention foodware, we mean all of the above items. Not included in this definition are packaging materials, like bottles and bottle caps, cans, food or condiment wrappers, and lids.

Single-use foodware is consistently one of the top categories of items found littering our coasts and beaches. In 2023, foodware made up nearly 10% of all items collected during Surfrider's beach cleanups. Almost 64,000 individual foodware items were removed from our coastal environment, with plastic straws, cups, and utensils making up the majority. Supporting the fact that foodware is a major source of pollution, one **Bay Area litter survey** found that 67% of the litter on Bay Area streets consisted of food and beverage packaging. And while there are different types of disposable foodware, our cleanup data confirms that most of it is single-use plastic.

Single-use plastic foodware is largely contributing to the plastic pollution crisis we're currently facing. **One report** estimated that 170-175 million plastic straws are used each day in the United States, totaling nearly 63 billion straws annually. Add in the other types of disposable foodware previously mentioned, and you'll quickly realize that we are inundated with single-use plastics that serve little to no purpose and are often used for mere minutes, if at all. These items are also **nearly impossible to recycle** which means they will ultimately end up in the landfill or our environment, where they will break down into smaller and smaller plastic fragments. Our cleanup data demonstrates that plastic fragments make up 33% of all items found during cleanups, making single-use plastic foodware a major source of pollution in our environment that we must work to eliminate.

In addition to the obvious environmental impacts, the widespread use of plastic disposable foodware is also contributing to climate change. As of 2017, an estimated **8.3 billion metric tons of plastics** had been made since plastic production began. Conventional plastic is **made from fossil fuels**, and the process of extracting and refining them is incredibly energy-intensive, resulting in millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions. Once these plastics have been used and disposed of, they **continue to emit greenhouse gasses** when exposed to the elements. From raw material extraction to the actual production of single-use plastics to their end of life in landfills or our environment, **emissions during the lifecycle** of single-use plastics are exponentially intensifying the impacts of climate change.

Not only is single-use plastic foodware threatening our planet, but it also poses a danger to our health. Plastic disposables are often made with harmful chemicals, including BPA and BPA alternatives. These **chemicals can leach** into the food and drinks that they come into contact with. This risk increases even more when the plastic is exposed to heat, including hot foods and beverages. Additionally, single-use plastics that come in contact with food and beverages can increase the chance of microplastic consumption. **One study found** that people who drink only plastic bottled water could be ingesting an additional 90,000 microplastic particles each year. Switching away from single-use plastic foodware can greatly reduce our chances of chemical exposure and microplastic ingestion and is the clear choice to keep people healthy.

Not only is single-use plastic foodware threatening our planet, but it also poses a danger to our health.



Exposure to BPA and other chemicals in plastic is linked with **developmental problems, heart disease, diabetes**, and more.



People who **drink only plastic bottled water** could be **ingesting an additional 90,000 microplastic particles** each year.



Plastic production facilities contribute to **cancer, asthma, and other diseases** in the communities adjacent to such manufacturing plants.

Increased reliance on single-use plastic foodware has left us facing the consequences of convenience. We're increasingly finding foodware littering our beaches and neighborhoods and it is fueling the climate catastrophe. So, where does this leave us? Are we doomed to a fate of future meals with a side of single-use plastic? Not if Surfrider has anything to do with it!



Clearing the Tables (and Our Beaches) of Single-Use Foodware

The Surfrider Foundation is taking a stand against single-use foodware. There are a multitude of solutions to the threat of disposable plastic foodware, and we are working from all angles to end this pollution. From innovative legal policy frameworks to public education and hospitality industry partnerships, we are confident that we can work together to end single-use plastic foodware pollution once and for all.

Just because using disposable foodware has become the norm doesn't mean it has to be that way, and Surfrider's [Ocean Friendly Restaurants](#) (OFR) program is exemplifying what a plastic-free future can look like – one meal at a time. The OFR program recognizes restaurants' commitment to eliminating single-use plastics and provides a simple, straightforward framework to help them make sustainable choices and achieve operational best practices to better protect our ocean. **In 2023**, 540 OFRs in 28 states and Puerto Rico served over 36 million single-use, plastic free meals. By requiring restaurants to use reusable foodware

for all onsite dining and only offering disposable foodware upon request, OFRs are leading by example in cutting out excess trash. This program also provides an [Ocean Friendly Foodware Guide](#) to help restaurant owners avoid greenwashing and source more sustainable foodware options. Surfrider's foodware guide includes restaurant case studies that demonstrate the financial benefits of eliminating single-use plastics. Restaurants can save over \$3,000 by simply implementing a "straws upon request only" policy, showing that plastic reduction can be both good for the environment and beneficial to a business's bottom line. The result of this program is a nationwide community of sustainably operating restaurants that serve as successful proofs of concept to positively influence plastic reduction legislation at the local, state, and federal levels.

In 2023, 540 OFRs in 28 states and Puerto Rico served over 36 million single-use, plastic free meals.

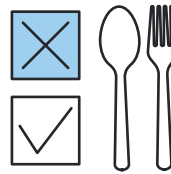


In addition to building support from businesses, another successful approach to reducing disposable foodware is through Surfrider’s policy advocacy. While we would love to see a widespread ban on certain single-use plastics, Surfrider and our partners are making great strides through “Skip the Stuff” policies. These bills aim to change consumer expectations of takeout and delivery orders by requiring customers to opt-in to receive them, rather than receiving disposable foodware automatically. In 2023, New York City passed a **monumental Skip the Stuff bill**.

“After three years of working with a coalition of local organizations, the New York City Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation is celebrating the passage of the “Skip the Stuff” bill in NYC, by a vote of 43-7 on January 19, 2023. Mayor Eric Adams signed the bill on February 1, 2023.

This will save restaurants money, as nationally, restaurants spend about **\$20 billion per year** on such items. It also includes protections for restaurants using third-party food delivery providers, warnings for first-time violations, and education requirements to inform businesses and consumers about the new rules. For these reasons, the largest restaurant association in the city, the NYC Hospitality Alliance, supported the bill. NYC Chapter volunteers attended a rally at City Hall, testified at two hearings, shared an action alert, educated the public at tabling events, and sent postcards to elected officials from members of the public. We are excited for this bill to finally pass and look forward to seeing a reduction in plastic pollution in New York.”

Surfrider and our partners are making great strides towards a **plastic-free future through “Skip the Stuff” policies.**



“Skip the Stuff” bills **prohibit** restaurants and third-party food delivery services from **providing single-use plastics** in delivery and takeout orders **unless requested** by the customer.



This will **save restaurants money**, reducing the massive **\$20 billion** they **collectively spend on single-use items** across the country **each year**.

With both our programmatic and policy arms, the Surfrider Foundation is fighting back against single-use plastic foodware pollution. As both the Ocean Friendly Restaurants program and the interest in Skip the Stuff continue to grow in new states, we are confident that we can reduce the hospitality industry’s dependency on disposable foodware and eliminate single-use plastic foodware. This will not only significantly decrease foodware found during beach cleanups but will also help cut back on the production of these wasteful single-use plastics – helping to curb plastic lifecycle emissions in the fight against climate change. A plastic-free future is a win for all of us, and our work in 2023 shows that when we come together, we can make that future an achievable reality.



Conclusion

Plastic pollution is a global issue and Surfrider’s Beach Cleanup program is one foundational way that we are working to address it. Over the last decade, Surfrider has proven itself as a force to be reckoned with when it comes to fighting plastic pollution – from engaging thousands of volunteers to collect hundreds of thousands of pounds of trash from our nation’s coasts and passing strong legislation that reduces single-use plastic pollution, our work in 2023 shows the true strength and potential of what can happen when we work together as One Surfrider.

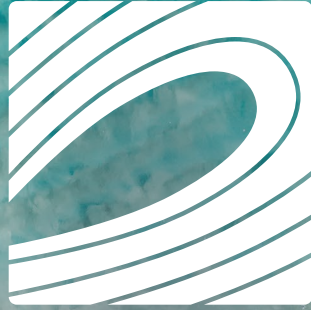
The achievements of 2023 are a testament to the grassroots growth and power of Surfrider’s nationwide network. Over 34,000 volunteers attended nearly 1,000

cleanups and removed 225,000 pounds of trash from our coasts and beaches – 82,000 pounds more than the previous year. But as our volunteer network gets bigger, so does the number of items we’re finding and picking up. Plastic pollution is an existential threat, and although Surfrider activists are working tirelessly, we cannot beach cleanup our way out of this mess. Only by turning off the tap of plastic production can we ensure that our sustainable vision for a plastic-free future becomes a reality.

Thank you to all of our supporters of the Beach Cleanup program, including our Better Beach Alliance partners, chapter leaders, and especially all of the volunteers who have participated in our beach cleanups.

From engaging thousands of volunteers to collect hundreds of thousands of pounds of trash from our nation’s coasts and passing strong legislation that reduces single-use plastic pollution, our work in 2023 shows the true strength and potential of what can happen when we work together as One Surfrider.





SURFRIDER
FOUNDATION

Surfrider.org