

# Coastal Steward Pledge for Classrooms and Youth Groups

## Information and Background for Teachers or Pledge Leaders

1. **Learn about the problem of marine debris. Talk to classmates, friends, and family about marine debris and why it's a serious problem.**

Visit [www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/marinedebris.html](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/marinedebris.html) for more information. Marine debris is trash in the ocean (or on its way there). Individuals and businesses create marine debris in a variety of ways, including littering, improper disposal, accidents, or carelessness. Marine debris is bad because it can damage ships, injure people, harm or kill animals through entanglement or ingestion, pollute the water with harmful chemicals, and much more. There are several videos on the topic in the Coastal Commission's free video lending library. Visit [www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/directory/educate.html](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/directory/educate.html) for details.

2. **Take a field trip to a local beach, river, or creek and clean up any trash that you see. (Consider taking part in the Adopt-A-Beach Program or the annual Coastal Cleanup Day.) If you keep track of the trash that you collect using a datacard, please send a copy of the information to the Coastal Commission. If you notice a particular problem at your site, like overflowing or inadequate trashcans, write a letter to or call the responsible agency (e.g. California State Parks, your city's Parks and Recreation or Public Works Department, etc.).**

Coastal Cleanup Day takes place throughout the world on the third Saturday every September, with about 70,000 Californians participating in our state. Adopt-A-Beach is a year-round program that allows you to organize your own cleanup and provides you with help selecting a site, getting supplies, and arranging for trash pickup. For information, visit [www.coastforyou.org](http://www.coastforyou.org) or call (800) Coast4U. Tips for educators, including links to lesson plans, can be found at [www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/ccd/educators.html](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/ccd/educators.html).

3. **"Adopt" your schoolyard, local park, or the street in front of your school. Once a week, do a cleanup of your adopted site. Recycle or compost whatever you can and place the rest in the garbage. While cleaning up your site, explain to other students or interested passers-by why it's important to keep this trash out of the environment.**

Trash on the street can end up in our waterways and eventually the ocean. The trash can blow into nearby creeks that feed into the bay or ocean, or it can enter storm drains. Storm drains usually do not lead to a water treatment plant. Instead, they flow directly to the nearest creek, river, or beach. Everything that flows into a storm drain may end up on the beach, so only rain should go down a storm drain. Help educate people about the importance of keeping our neighborhoods clean, and of never pouring anything (such as paint or motor oil) onto the street or down a storm drain. Visit [www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/ccd/educators.html](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/ccd/educators.html) for tips.

4. **Start a "waste-free" lunch program at your school.**

Creating less waste in the first place means there will be less marine debris. Learn how to create less waste when bringing lunch to school. Instead of throwaway packaging like individual yogurt containers, snack packages, juice boxes, and paper bags, pack lunches in reusable containers such as jars, thermoses, and sturdy lunch boxes and bags. You might want to create a handout to send home to parents with ideas on how they can easily create less trash while saving money on expensive single-serving items. Find more information at [www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/ccd/educators.html](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/ccd/educators.html)

5. **Challenge another class (or group within your class or youth group) to a no-trash lunch challenge. Set a date to create as little lunch trash as possible by bringing food in reusable containers and composting any food waste. The class or group that creates the least trash wins. Afterwards, try to continue your no-trash lunch efforts.**

A competition is a great way to really get into the effort of creating less trash, and can be a way to share what you know with others. Maybe you could engage the whole school in an effort to waste less at lunchtime. Scouts can hold "no trash" outings. Be mindful of students who receive free and reduced-cost lunches at school, as it may not be within their control to pack a lunch. Presenting cafeteria waste reduction suggestions to the principal or superintendent may a good alternative if this is an issue for your students.

6. **Use the backsides of paper for scratch paper, for printing drafts, and for anything that doesn't need to look "perfect." Keep a box of flat, ready to use scratch paper, where people can place their one-sided paper and grab a sheet to use.**
7. **Keep classroom recycling bins for paper (that can't be used as scratch paper) and for bottles and cans. Start a recycling program at your school. CalRecycle provides information on school recycling at <https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/ReduceWaste/Schools>. A Recycling Committee made up of students, teachers, and parents can help decide the best way to take the materials to the recycling center, or arrange for a waste hauler to pick up the recyclables.**
8. **Start a worm compost bin for your classroom. For information, download Cal Recycle's Worm Guide at [www.coastal.ca.gov/wormguide.pdf](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/wormguide.pdf).**

Again, creating less waste in the first place means less marine debris in the long run. It also means less greenhouse gas produced to disrupt our climate and ecosystems, and composting helps sequester carbon in the soil and reduce methane emitted from landfills. Remember that the slogan "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" is in order of the greatest impact. Reduce all the waste that you can, reuse everything possible, recycle what you can't reuse. When this philosophy is second nature to everyone, we'll be on our way to protecting our oceans and the rest of our environment.

- 9. Do a regular water use patrol of your school's bathrooms to check for leaky faucets and running toilets. Inform school authorities of any problems and follow up to see that they are fixed. If students leave faucets running in the bathrooms, consider placing signs near the sinks reminding people to turn off faucets when they're not using them. Get permission from school administrators first.**

Conserving water is important for a healthy coast and ocean. If your drinking water comes from a river, using water reduces the flow of that river. The less water coming down the river to the ocean, the less healthy that river environment may be for fish and other animals that travel between the salty ocean and the freshwater river. Less river flow may mean less sand traveling down the river to your favorite beach. Also, when water goes down the drain it has to be cleaned at a water treatment plant. Once the water has been cleaned, the waste that's been removed must be disposed of and the clean water must be "discharged", often into the bay or ocean. This discharge can change the salinity of the body of water it's emptied into, which may alter the habitat of the plants and animals that live there. In addition, transporting and cleaning water uses a lot of energy. That energy usually comes from fossil fuels, which contribute to climate change, impacting our coastal and inland environments

- 10. If your school plans a celebration, discourage the organizers from releasing or decorating with balloons as part of the festivities. Balloons may become marine debris, endangering animals that may mistake them for food.**

What goes up must come down, and that adage is true of balloons. They may look pretty floating off into the sky, but the harm they cause to animals is NOT worth it. Like other marine debris, balloons may be mistaken for food by animals, causing choking or a false sense of fullness from a stomach full of trash. Eating marine debris can seriously harm or kill animals. Encourage your school or community to discover another way to celebrate the culmination of an event, such as singing a song or planting a tree or native wildflowers.

- 11. Drive less. Create a signup for carpool buddies and encourage walking and biking to school and/or group meetings. Safe Routes to School in Marin has tips at [saferoutestoschools.org](http://saferoutestoschools.org).**

Drive less to reduce your greenhouse gas emissions, which will help slow the effects of climate change such as sea level rise; increased storm severity; and ocean acidification, a significant threat to ocean creatures.

- 12. Write a letter (individually or as a class) to the editor of your local newspaper or to an elected official. Write about an important coastal issue and describe any actions you think should be taken.**

Policy makers respond to public demand. If you've researched an issue and want to share what you've learned, or if you want to recommend specific action on a problem, tell your elected officials. Writing to the editor helps you spread the word to other members of the public, as well as the people in power (who do read those letters!). It may also inspire the newspaper to publish an article on the issue. You can also write to specific businesses to let them know if you think they're doing a good job or if you think they could do better with regard to a coastal issue. For tips on writing effective letters, see Appendix D of *Waves, Wetlands, and Watersheds* at [www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/waves/waves\\_appendices.pdf](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/waves/waves_appendices.pdf)

- 13. Learn about overfishing and sustainable seafood and share your knowledge with friends and family. Visit [www.seafoodwatch.org](http://www.seafoodwatch.org) for more information and to download the Seafood Watch Pocket Guide.**

Due to overfishing and environmental factors, some marine species are in trouble. You can choose to help instead of harm by only purchasing and eating fish that are harvested sustainably. A sustainable fishery is one that, in the long-term, does not endanger the ecosystem. The Seafood Watch guide tells you which species are sustainable and which are not. Sharing this information with those who buy or cook seafood, like parents, cafeterias, restaurants, and markets, will make a difference for the health of our oceans. If your class is in middle or high school, you may want to consider borrowing the video *Empty Oceans, Empty Nets* from the Coastal Commission's free lending library. Visit [www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/directory/educate.html](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/publiced/directory/educate.html) for details.

## What else can you do?

There are many more things your classroom, scout troop, or youth group can do to care for our coast and the rest of our environment. Here are just a few ideas:

- Do a campus environmental audit to analyze resource use and waste generation at your school. Ideas can be found at Grades of Green, [www.gradesofgreen.org/green-activity/classroom-energy-audit](http://www.gradesofgreen.org/green-activity/classroom-energy-audit) and National Wildlife Federation, <https://www.nwf.org/Eco-Schools-USA/Become-an-Eco-School/Pathways/Consumption-and-Waste/Audit>
- Encourage your school or organization to develop a waste-free policy for all functions, such as PTA meetings, sports events, and carnivals. Reduce or eliminate the use of disposable items, especially those made of plastic, in favor of reusables. In the process, educate students and families on the reasons for your efforts.
- Get your students involved in habitat restoration efforts. To find out what's going on in your area, contact your parks department or local environmental organizations. Restoration projects are often looking for student volunteers.