

Alliance for the Great Lakes: Adopt-a-Beach program springs into action for 2017 beach season

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Beach cleanup season begins around the Great Lakes; Volunteers removed over 40,000 lbs of trash in 2016

Thursday, April 13, 2017 (Chicago) – As spring finally begins to appear around the Great Lakes, volunteers are heading out to beaches for a spring cleaning. The Alliance for the Great Lakes' Adopt-a-Beach program mobilizes thousands of volunteers who give back to their local beaches each year. April, especially Earth Day, marks the unofficial beginning of the beach season around the Great Lakes as many groups hold their first Adopt-a-Beach events of the year.

Last year, 15,181 Adopt-a-Beach volunteers picked up 40,211 pounds of debris as part of 1,388 cleanups around the region. In addition to cleaning up beaches, volunteers collect valuable data. The data is shared with beach managers and scientists. The results: cleaner beaches and data on pollution sources that can be used to develop solutions to pollution problems.

Data collected by Adopt-a-Beach volunteers gives insight into the most common and problematic types of litter. In 2016, the majority of trash picked up by Adopt-a-Beach volunteers (87%) was plastic. Plastic is problematic for a number of reasons. In addition to being an eyesore, it can harm the lakes and animals that live in them. Over time, plastic litter breaks down into small pieces which can be eaten by birds, fish, and other wildlife.

Plastic was the most common material of litter, and includes a wide range of items like cigarette filters, water bottles, food containers, or even left behind beach toys. The three most common types of litter found in 2016 were tiny trash (made up of broken down pieces of plastic and glass), smoking-related litter, and food-related litter. Most litter found on Great Lakes beaches is anthropogenic, meaning it originated from human activity.

“Keeping Great Lakes beaches and shorelines beautiful is no small task, and it couldn’t be done without the incredible efforts of volunteers all over the region,” said Joel Brammeier, Alliance for the Great Lakes President & CEO. “Each cleanup, when combined with hundreds of similar events across the Great Lakes, makes a big difference for the lakes.”

Volunteers interested in participating in Adopt-a-Beach can find events in their community, or start their own cleanup, by visiting www.greatlakesadopt.org.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes works to protect the Great Lakes for today and tomorrow. We involve tens of thousands of people each year in advocacy, volunteering, education, and research to ensure the lakes are healthy and safe for all. Learn more at greatlakes.org and greatlakesadopt.org.