

Opinion: Ocean drowning in plastic

By Mark Gold and Cara Horowitz

You've probably seen the images of dolphins caught in abandoned monofilament fishing nets, or of vast areas of plastic trash floating in remote waters of the Pacific, or of sea turtles consuming plastic bags that look remarkably like one of their favorite foods: jellyfish. Or perhaps, after a rainstorm, you've walked on a beach that resembled a landfill. Some 20 million tons of plastic pollution enters the oceans each year, and it's devastating the marine environment.

Plastic litter is also costly. On the West Coast alone, according to a recent EPA study, the cost of cleaning up marine litter comes to more than \$13 per person per year. And because plastic typically does not degrade in the ocean, today's pollution will be a problem for many generations to come.

Locally, there have been some success stories. Thanks to state and federal environmental requirements, the Los Angeles region has installed screens on more than 50,000 storm water basins, as well as inserts that keep all but the smallest plastic pollution out of local rivers, beaches and bays. Additionally, bans on single-use plastic bags in a number of local jurisdictions have reduced plastic bag use by tens of millions of bags annually. And West Hollywood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and Malibu have banned single-use foam food packaging. All of these measures have meant less plastic ending up in the ocean locally.

Statewide, legislation to ban plastic bags has failed numerous times due to successful lobbying efforts from plastic bag manufacturers and others, but nevertheless, more than 10

million Californians live in cities that have banned the bag. The State Water Resources Control Board will soon release a statewide trash policy that builds on the Los Angeles area's successful trash control measures.

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