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## **Tons of Suspected Japan Tsunami Debris Wash Ashore in Alaska**

### **Bottles, Buoys, Foam Insulation, Shoes, Fuel Cans Litter Miles of Beaches**

By Ted Land

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KAYAK ISLAND, Alaska

Tons of debris suspected to have washed into the Pacific Ocean during the March 2011 Japan tsunami, are showing up on Alaska's coastline.

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On Kayak Island, roughly 60 miles southeast of Cordova, hundreds of buoys, thousands of bottles, countless fuel cans, shoes, chunks of building insulation, and other household items litter the beach for miles.

It's even worse on Montague Island, according to Chris Pallister, president of Gulf of Alaska Keeper, a non-profit group which cleans up beaches each spring and summer.

"It's a staggering mess," he said during a visit to Kayak Island last Friday, "the magnitude of this is just hard to comprehend and I've been looking at this stuff a long time."

Junk has been washing ashore on Kayak Island for as long as anyone can remember. The coastline there is the final resting place for a lot of buoys, nets, and trash which are cast overboard in the Pacific Ocean each year.

But this spring the debris field is different, say people who know the area well.

"We're definitely seeing a lot of new stuff that wasn't here in the past," said Mike Collins, a pilot who lives in Cordova and has been visiting nearby beaches almost his entire life.

For example, chunks of pink and blue insulation, which appear to be from buildings, are everywhere on Kayak Island. Also, white and black floats the size of oil barrels are showing up.

"There are literally hundreds of these things," said Collins, holding one up.

Much of the debris has Japanese writing on it. The items are generally clean, not covered in algae or barnacles, and are not buried in the sand.

"The first time that I noticed it was when I came back up the coast from Sitka, which would've been probably 3 weeks ago," said Collins.

Peter Murphy, Alaska coordinator for NOAA's Marine Debris Monitoring Program, said that the agency is receiving an increased number of reports of debris on Kayak Island and Montague Island.

He said that while they have not been able to confirm specific objects are from the Japan tsunami, "certainly the unusual quantity is a clue."

NOAA, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation flew to Montague Island on Saturday to document the large amount of debris, Murphy said.

According to NOAA, several variables affect when and where Japanese tsunami debris will make landfall in North America.

Winds and ocean currents are constantly changing, making it difficult to come up with a reliable forecast.

But according to NOAA's Marine Debris Monitoring Program, "some buoyant items may have reached the Pacific Northwest coast during winter 2011-2012."

Earlier this month, the U.S. Coast Guard sank an abandoned Japanese fishing boat, which was floating toward Alaska's coast.

The vessel was believed to have been set adrift by the tsunami.

A KTUU reporter visited the beach on Kayak Island last Friday with a personal radiation monitor, which picked up very low, routine, background levels of radiation. The levels were not harmful and were no different from levels detected in Anchorage.

Several plastic containers contained gasoline and other unknown substances. Bottles of toilet bowl cleaner, detergents and a variety of other household products were also spotted on the beach.

"We could pick this up in a summer but it would be an all summer effort," said Pallister.

*KTUU will air special reports from Kayak Island Monday evening on Channel 2 News.*

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