



## **Japan Tsunami Marine Debris Volunteer Debris Removal Guidelines**

Developed by the California Coastal Commission in support of the California Tsunami Marine Debris Multiagency Advisory Coordination Group (MAC-G).

**Goal:** Provide technical support to local, state, and federal agencies and non-profit volunteer organizations tasked with removing debris, including potentially contaminated marine debris, and marine debris generated by the Japan tsunami of March 2011.

**Role of Response Organizations:** When conducting any beach cleanup, all responding agencies and organizations should follow basic safety precautions, outlined below, under the assumption that the debris to be removed may potentially include items containing hazardous materials.

According to recent modeling results, faster moving items related to the Japan tsunami may have already been deposited on beaches along the West Coast, British Columbia, and Alaska. Recent sightings of confirmed debris in Alaska agree with these projections. People who visit the coast and depend on the ocean are understandably concerned. We encourage caution and awareness; but there is no reason to stop fishing or avoid the coast. It is important to keep in mind that there is an extremely low likelihood that any tsunami debris from Japan is radioactive since the tsunami struck days before the Fukushima-Daiichi power plant incident occurred and the debris was likely carried out to sea before ever becoming contaminated. In addition, the tsunami affected an area of over 200 square miles, while the Fukushima-Daiichi plant was located in a very small portion of this area; thus the vast majority of the debris that entered the Pacific originated from areas far removed from the site of the nuclear plant. Despite these facts, incidences of potentially radioactive and/or hazardous debris items on U.S. shores are still possible as the tsunami debris may have contained everyday radiation and hazardous materials sources, such as household hazardous waste or contaminated debris from hospitals or other locations.

**Basic Procedure:** Volunteers who are performing beach cleanups, and the organizations or agencies that are managing those volunteers, should always keep safety as a foremost concern in their minds. A few basic guidelines can help avoid any unintentional injury or distress:

1. Volunteers should wear a glove on the hand with which they are picking up trash. Volunteers should also wear closed-toe shoes (no flip-flops or bare feet) at all times and have clothing and sun-block to protect from the sun.

2. Don't touch or pick up dead animals, or attempt to move injured animals. Instead, make the cleanup organizer aware of the animals and where they are located. The Cleanup organizer will contact the responsible authorities.
3. Volunteers should never pick up syringes, needles, or any hazardous objects. Mark the area and notify the cleanup organizer or local official of the hazardous item's location.
4. Always stay in teams of at least two.
5. Be cautious and aware of sensitive habitat areas (i.e. sand dunes).
6. Avoid over-exertion, sunburn, heat exhaustion, and dehydration. When in doubt, come in early.
7. All children under 14 should be supervised by an adult at all times.
8. Volunteers should not lift anything too heavy; when in doubt, don't try!
9. Do not go near any suspected hazardous materials (e.g., propane tanks, oil or chemical drums, etc.). If debris is spotted that a volunteer suspects to be hazardous or potentially hazardous, the debris should be left untouched and the cleanup organizer should be immediately informed. The local fire/hazmat department, environmental health agency or the Coast Guard National Response Center (800-424-8802) should be notified and respond as appropriate. While it is highly unlikely that marine debris will be radioactive and hazardous marine debris items such as drums or chemical canisters are uncommon, it is important that marine debris that is suspected as being hazardous be assessed and removed by trained professionals who can ensure the public's safety.

Additionally, if Japan tsunami marine debris is identified please report that discovery to the NOAA Marine Debris Program at: [DisasterDebris@noaa.gov](mailto:DisasterDebris@noaa.gov).

Comments or questions can be directed to:

Eben Schwartz  
Statewide Outreach Manager  
California Coastal Commission  
45 Fremont Street, Suite 2000  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
(415) 904-5210 office :: (415) 904-5216 fax  
[eschwartz@coastal.ca.gov](mailto:eschwartz@coastal.ca.gov)  
[www.coastforyou.org](http://www.coastforyou.org)

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