



2021 Marine Debris Work Group Progress Report

Reporting Period: January 2021 – December 2021

Work Group Webpage: <https://www.midatlanticocean.org/ocean-planning/work-groups-collaborative-efforts/marine-debris-work-group/>

Work Group Leads: Laura McKay (VA); Maureen Krudner (EPA)

Work Group Members: Work group membership is open to government and non-governmental entities operating in the five Mid-Atlantic states and the District of Columbia that are willing to participate in work group activities. Members are expected to contribute on monthly work group calls and assist with project implementation.

Current Members Include:

Last Name	First Name	Organization
Blair	Devon	NJ
Bristow	Avalon	MARCO
Carr	Emmalee	NJ
Chesnin	Noah	Wildlife Conservation Society
Fleming	Kate	DE Sea Grant
Gemenden	JoAnn	NJ Clean Communities
Gove	Matt	Surfrider
Gronostajski	Kyle	Alliance for a Living Ocean
Hassell	Kevin	NJ
Huber	Sandy	NJDOT Clean Communities Council
Johnson	Cathy	National Park Service
Keane	Ellen	NOAA/NMFS/Protected Resources

Kehoe	Christy	NOAA
Krudner*	Maureen	EPA
Kuriawa	John	NOAA/NOS/OCM
Mazzeo-Pfoertner	Christie	NY DOS
McKay*	Laura	VA
Morrow	Donna	MD
Muthukrishnan	Swarna	Clean Ocean Action - NJ
Neusner	Gabriella	EPA HQ Trash Free Waters
Personius	Casey	NY
Raabe	Steve	OpinionWorks
Register	Katie	Clean VA Waterways
Robinson	Matt	D.C.
Sanders	Hannah	EPA Region 3 Trash Free Waters
Shifren	Sheri	NJ
St. Laurent	Kari	DE
Trapani	Christina	VA Contractor
Weis	Judith	Rutgers
Witmer	Virginia	VA

* *Co-Leads*

Work Group Goals, Objectives and Actions: This work builds on Action 4 of the 2016 Mid-Atlantic Ocean Action Plan: "Develop a regionally appropriate strategy for marine debris reduction." For calendar year 2021, the Work Group is focusing on four activities: developing a Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) campaign to change behavior resulting in marine debris reduction at the Mid-Atlantic regional scale, with an initial focus on reducing balloon releases; conducting shoreline marine debris surveys and documenting the quantities and types of debris found; completing and implementing a Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Reduction Plan; and maintaining a marine debris projects inventory website. The Work Group may also, in late 2021, apply for a FY22 NOAA Marine Debris Program Prevention grant.

ACTIVITY 1 - Continue the community-based social marketing campaign to reduce balloon releases

Expected Completion Date: July 2022

Continue the balloon release reduction campaign based on community-based social marketing principles. This activity is funded by a 2018 NOAA Marine Debris Program grant to MARCO and builds off of the work conducted via Virginia CZM's Joyful Send-Off Balloon Release Reduction Campaign. The Virginia work was advised by Doug McKenzie-Mohr, author of "Community-based Social Marketing." He will be asked again in 2021, if budget allows and he is available, to review final messages for the campaign and overall dissemination strategy. In 2021, once the campaign materials are produced, stakeholder outreach will be conducted via digital content on the website, social media and other techniques that are expected to be effective. In the out years, data will be collected that will begin to measure and evaluate overall campaign success.

A1 Progress Description

(Include results for the period, stakeholder engagement, impediments to progress, and budgetary/ resource needs)

A1 Progress Period: January 2021 - June 2021

In addition to monthly meetings of the full Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Work Group, a small balloon reduction core team (comprised of at least one member from each MARCO state, as well as OpinionWorks, Clean Virginia Waterways, and representatives four partner aquariums) met on a bi-monthly basis to ensure continued momentum of the regional balloon debris reduction campaign strategy.

During this reporting period, OpinionWorks conducted another round of message testing among self-identified frequent balloon releasers. The campaign messages were presented for a final round of review by ten participants from all five states (two per state) who identified as frequent balloon releasers. Some key takeaways from this survey are:

- Seeing the impact on animals who have ingested or become entangled in balloons deeply moves people.
- After seeing this impact, people want to know what they can do to prevent this. It would be most effective to show the impact and the alternative on the same message.
- Following the animal images with an illustration of alternatives converts people into wanting to take action. Alternatives that are ceremonial and create a lasting tribute (such as planting things that will grow) are effective strategies for

countering people's motivation to use a balloon release to "send prayers to heaven."

- If properly executed, people who were actively releasing balloons want to become ambassadors: "I have to tell my family!" "We have to stop!"

The project team is now moving forward with developing materials for the campaign, which include a series of images that can be adapted to different spatial and product types (posters, social media messages, etc.).

A1 Progress Period: July 2021- December 2021

Monthly Core Team meetings were held to draft and finalize outreach materials for the balloon reduction campaign, which launched on October 4, 2021. An online pledge form, decals, posters with images of the impacts and alternatives of balloon releases, and social media posts were created and distributed to aquarium partners. Additional partners participated in the social media aspect of the campaign. The initial launch lasted two months.

A Core Team meeting was held after the initial launch to review and discuss what worked well and where the campaign can improve. Adjustments will be made based on feedback for a second launch in Spring 2022.

During this progress period a second sub-group was created to address media coverage of balloon releases. The group is drafting materials to be sent to media contacts to inform them of the dangers balloon releases pose in an effort to halt coverage of the topic in a positive way.

ACTIVITY 2 - Conduct bi-annual assessments of balloon and other debris

Expected Completion Date: July 2022

Monitoring will be conducted on 1 mile stretches of beaches in each of the five Mid-Atlantic states. Staff and volunteers will collect data on the number and type of balloons identified as well as other types of debris. Data will be shared on the MACO Work Group pages of the MARCO website. These surveys are being conducted with funding from the 2018 NOAA Marine Debris Grant mentioned above. The results from the surveys may inform other elements of this project, including campaign strategy and success measures.

A2 Progress Description

Include: results for the period, stakeholder engagement, impediments to progress, and budgetary/resource needs.

A2 Progress Period: January 2021 - June 2021

The COVID-19 global pandemic initiated closures of public spaces throughout this reporting period, and similarly state employee travel was restricted during that time. Despite these restrictions, all five states (VA, MD, DE, NJ and NY) were able to complete beach monitoring during this reporting period, but one could not. Virginia conducted a survey on April 4, Delaware completed a spring survey in March 2021, Maryland conducted its spring survey April 12; NJ conducted a survey on May 14; and NY conducted a survey on June 23.

State	Total Balloon Debris Pieces collected in Winter/Spring 2021	Total non-balloon debris* pieces collected in Winter/Spring 2021
Virginia	118	1098
Maryland	7	286
Delaware	6	113
New Jersey	12	179
New York	158	1,281

A2 Progress Period: July 2021 - December 2021

The COVID-19 global pandemic continued to disrupt beach monitoring survey plans due to close contact restrictions. Despite these restrictions, three out of five states were able to complete beach mentoring in Fall 2021. Virginia conducted a survey on, Delaware completed a fall survey on November 30, and Maryland conducted its fall survey October 6.

State	Total Balloon Debris Pieces collected in Summer/Fall 2021	Total non-balloon debris* pieces collected in Summer/Fall 2021
Virginia	289	1,931
Maryland	7	100
Delaware	0	76
New Jersey	N/A	N/A
New York	N/A	N/A

** Non-balloon related debris include but are not limited to: bags (paper, plastic, and other materials), bottles (glass, plastic, other), bottle caps, cans, cigarette butts, lighters, clothing, fishing materials, k-cups, foam fragments, hard or film plastic pieces, rope, shotgun shells, straws, construction material.*

ACTIVITY 3 - Support and Participate in the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan

Expected Completion Date: Plan developed by early 2021 and implementation to continue through 2026.

The Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan would bring together the Mid-Atlantic marine debris communities to document entities working on marine debris with the purpose of increasing coordination, adding value to existing efforts, and identifying future actions. The Plan will strengthen Mid-Atlantic regional effectiveness by bringing our marine debris community together to develop a regional marine debris action plan that addresses current marine debris issues in the region and to create a road map for the future. In collaboration with NOAA Marine Debris Program, we will participate in Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan conversations, help set regional priorities, and attend a workshop to identify the needs of the Mid-Atlantic marine debris community.

In early 2021, the draft Action Plan will be distributed to both attendees and the broader Mid-Atlantic marine debris community for additional feedback and to provide further opportunity for other organizations to commit to implementing actions needing additional support. The NOAA MDP will then publish the Action Plan and share with partners and leads in early 2021. Once published, the MDP will lead semi-annual monitoring for the Action Plan with partners and leads through 2021. Action leads and partners will begin implementing/coordinating actions. MDP will coordinate semi-annual monitoring for actions with leads and partners and share summary updates through 2026.

A3 Progress Description

Include: results for the period, stakeholder engagement, impediments to progress, and budgetary/resource needs

A3 Progress Period : January 2021 - June 2021

[The Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan](#) was published in May 2021. The 2021 Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan (Action Plan) was created by a voluntary, collaborative effort of 96 organizations in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The Action Plan encompasses work that will be undertaken in the next five years (2021-2026) and establishes a comprehensive

framework for strategic action to help reduce the impacts of marine debris on the Mid-Atlantic and its coasts, people, and wildlife. In total, more than 150 participants from across the region were engaged in developing the Action Plan, and 96 partners committed to a total of 54 actions. The Action Plan also incorporates the principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion as core values across all goals.

A3 Progress Period: July 2021 - December 2021 (Anticipated Progress)

Semi-Annual Reporting: The Action Plan's metrics tracking information is in Appendix B, page 39. Semi-annual reporting will take place in January and July. NOAA MDP will collect data using Google Forms at the start of these months, then synthesize and share progress.

Semi-Annual E-Newsletters and Coordination Calls: Action plan partners identified interest in having semi-annual e-newsletters and semi-annual goal-based coordination calls. The Action Plan community will use these as opportunities to network, share information, and check-in on action plan progress. The first e-newsletter and goal-based coordination call roughly six months out from the publication date, likely in November 2021. More information on specific dates and agenda to be shared at a later date.

ACTIVITY 4 - Update Projects Database in the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaboration Portal

Expected Completion Date: Continual

In order to determine on which, type of marine debris and what type of projects the work group should focus, the group created an Excel file of previously conducted projects in all five states. Meanwhile, NOAA had been working with the Great Lakes states to create a collaborative website which served the same function, but also included a mapping feature for the projects. Subsequently NOAA offered to create a similar collaborative website for the Mid-Atlantic into which the data from the Excel file could be uploaded. This ["Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaborative" website](#) allows identified staff in each state to upload information about marine debris reduction efforts. This website can also be viewed by all stakeholders and the general public.

A4 Progress Description

Include: results for the period, stakeholder engagement, impediments to progress, and budgetary/resource needs

A4 Progress Period: January 2021 - June 2021

NOAA Marine Debris Program conducted an informal training session for the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Work Group members during their June 2021 monthly call. This helps ensure that people in the Work Group understand how to access and upload project information on the database. There are currently 92 projects in the database.

A4 Progress Period: July 2021 - December 2021

There are currently 94 projects in the database.

ACTIVITY 5 - Conduct a 2021 Regional Marine Debris Summit

Expected Completion Date: Summer 2021

Status: Completed

The NOAA Office for Coastal Management awarded a match-free grant of \$15,000 to the Virginia CZM Program to support a two-day day Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Regional Summit in 2021. The goal of the Summit is to inspire and empower our partners with solutions to marine debris impacts. Summit attendees will represent state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, academia, and other groups that are conducting work related to marine debris reduction in any of the five Mid-Atlantic coastal states (New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) and Washington, DC.

The funds will be used to: 1) hold the two-day summit virtually; 2) secure and disseminate resources, such as presentations and reports, that are presented at the Summit and post them online for other interested regional stakeholders via VA CZM's website, as was done for the [2019 Summit](#); develop and disseminate a post-Summit survey to inform future events; and prepare a summary report of the Summit proceedings.

A5 Progress Description

Include: results for the period, stakeholder engagement, impediments to progress, and budgetary/resource needs

A5 Progress Period: January 2021 - June 2021

A total of 496 individuals registered for the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Summit from across the US and the world (34 countries including Algeria, Angola, Antigua & Barbuda, Australia, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Caribbean Netherlands, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guam, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain, Suriname, The Netherlands, Ukraine, United Kingdom).

The planning team produced a save the date flyer, webpages on the MARCO website, an Eventbrite registration form, multiple social media posts, break videos, and a detailed script for each day. A post-Summit survey has been developed the results of which will be shared in the next progress report.

The Summit Planning Team consisted of Christy Kehoe (NOAA-MDP), Avalon Bristow (MARCO), Matt Robinson (DC DOEE), Laura McKay (VA CZM), Katie Register (Clean VA Waterways at Longwood University), Christie-Mazze-Pfoertner (NY DOS) and Virginia Witmer (VA CZM), who met at least every other week from February through July 2021. A Save the Date flyer was created and distributed to the public in April and May, and the Summit agenda was shared upon finalization in mid-June 2021.

A5 Progress Period: July 2021 - December 2021

The Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Summit was successfully held on the afternoons of July 20-22 and recorded. Sessions focused on new initiatives, recent research and policy changes and solutions by 34 speakers across the topics of single use plastics, microplastics & microfibers, derelict fishing gear and at the national regional and local scale.

A Post-Summit Survey was distributed to all attendees. Survey results concluded that most attendees learned about the summit through a colleague, and a three way tie for what attendees liked most about the summit were the virtual platform, the length of the summit, and research presentations. While a majority of attendees plan to attend again in the future and felt the length of the summit was appropriate, attendees did state it would not have been possible to attend in person confirming a virtual summit was the most successful option. Comments for what topics attendees want to see included in future summits included more of what was already covered, specifically community-based social marketing and derelict fishing gear. In an open ended question on how we can improve for the next summit, most comments complimented our efforts with one suggestion to include break-out sessions for attendees to be able to interact with one another.

