

## Melbourne Beach targets plastic bags to help sea turtles

*Rick Neale, FLORIDA TODAY Published 4:25 p.m. ET July 10, 2015*

5-6 minutes

---

Flimsy plastic shopping bags typically end up “out of sight, out of mind” of most Florida consumers — but these throwaway sacks can easily end up tangled inside the guts of an unsuspecting sea turtle.

“The single-use plastic bag has an annoying habit of ending up in our marine environment. And once in the ocean, when they are suspended in the water column, they bear an uncanny resemblance to a jellyfish,” said Mike Daniels, chairman of the Surfrider Foundation’s Sebastian Inlet chapter.

“Loggerheads and leatherbacks eat jellyfish in big numbers. So once they’re in the marine environment, they are frequently ingested by turtles,” Daniel said.

Saturday, the Surfrider Foundation chapter, Sea Turtle Conservancy and Melbourne Beach officials will kick off a “Rise Above Plastics” campaign by handing out free reusable shopping bags to town residents at the Melbourne Beach Public Library.

CERTON, a Melbourne software-hardware firm, donated 3,200 reusable bags for the program. Daniel said Tim Stockton, the company’s president and chief executive officer, is an environmentally conscious surfer.

Participating Melbourne Beach merchants will also distribute the free bags using in-store displays featuring informational graphics.

Daniel said the Melbourne Beach pilot program will serve as a “test bed” for future potential expansion in Indian Shores, Indian Harbour Beach and Satellite Beach. CERTON donated \$5,000 for the reusable bags and the Surfrider Foundation chipped in \$1,000 for other costs, Daniel said.

He said Melbourne Beach was chosen based on its close proximity to the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, North America’s most significant nesting area for loggerhead turtle and green turtles.

As of July 3, refuge volunteers had documented 9,749 loggerhead nests, 4,613 green turtle nests and 55 leatherback nests so far this season.

Nikia Rice is a Florida Institute of Technology graduate student and the Sea Turtle Preservation Society's education coordinator. In an ongoing study with Dr. Blair Witherington, she has analyzed the gut contents of 380 dead, tiny "wash-back" sea turtles found along the Brevard County coast.

Her findings? A startling 78 percent of those baby turtles had eaten plastics.

"Some of these animals — I'm not kidding — they had 100 pieces in their stomachs," Rice said.

"Plastics only break down into smaller pieces of plastics. And they congregate out there in the Sargassum seaweed, where these turtles spend the first couple years of their lives. They're opportunistic feeders, and they'll eat anything that fits into their mouths," she said.

The Melbourne Beach Town Commission passed a resolution last September encouraging citizens and merchants to replace plastic bags with reusable bags. The commission's stance occurred amid years of unsuccessful plastic-bag curbing attempts in Tallahassee.

State Sen. Dwight Bullard, D-Cutler Bay, whose district includes the Everglades and Florida Keys, introduced a bill this session that would let coastal cities with fewer than 100,000 residents establish pilot programs to regulate or ban disposable plastic bags.

State Rep. David Richardson, D-Miami Beach, filed a companion bill in the House. Both bills died in committee.

The Surfrider Foundation chapter is a nonprofit environmental group that focuses on beaches from Patrick Air Force Base to Sebastian Inlet.

"We're trying to get the people to use reusable bags and demand less plastic bags. Sometimes, you go in and you buy one item you could easily carry out of the store. Think twice before you accept that plastic bag," Daniel said.

"You can talk to Waste Management about how much they hate these things. They blow around the landfill and get airborne — and they end up in the ocean and the lagoon, where they harm marine life. They're a terrible problem for birds as well," he said.

Contact Neale at 321-242-3638, [rneale@floridatoday.com](mailto:rneale@floridatoday.com) or follow [@RickNeale1](https://twitter.com/RickNeale1) on Twitter

### **Campaign kickoff**

Melbourne Beach residents can pick up free reusable shopping bags during a "Rise Above Plastics" presentation at noon Saturday at the Melbourne Beach Public Library, 324 Ocean Ave.

## **Titusville cleanup details**

Keep Brevard Beautiful and FLORIDA TODAY will host a Spoil Islands Cleanup from 8:30 a.m. to noon July 18 at Parrish Park, 1 A. Max Brewer Memorial Parkway, Titusville.

Volunteers should meet at the marine patrol boat ramps. Boaters will transport volunteers to the spoil islands to pick up trash.

KBB will provide bags, gloves and grabbers. A post-event party will take place at Crackerjacks Island Seafood & Tiki Bar, 2 A. Max Brewer Memorial Parkway

Boaters are welcome to participate. For information, contact Bryan Bobbitt at [bryanbobbittkbb@yahoo.com](mailto:bryanbobbittkbb@yahoo.com) or 321-631-0501 ext. 203.

Since June 13, KBB and FLORIDA TODAY have teamed up on three shoreline cleanups that collected a combined 3,200 pounds of trash.

Read or Share this story: <http://on.flatoday.com/1IPMW88>