

CLEAN BLUE
INVESTIGATE

TAKE THE PLEDGE | EST. 2022



Marine Litter Audit

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM TO FIND SOLUTIONS



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x *2 Promise*

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Introduction

A marine litter audit involves collecting litter from a specific area of a beach or beaches to analyse its contents.

Conducting an audit will provide invaluable information about the kind of plastic pollution you're dealing with, and will help you set a baseline from which to measure progress.

Although you can conduct marine litter audits at any stage of your journey (and we recommend you run them at least annually), they're a particularly useful place to start because of the information they provide.

"It was hard work but I learned so much, met wonderful people... I feel part of the solution and now do more environmental projects."

A marine litter audit takes a bit of planning, and you can't do it on your own. This handbook is in two parts to explain how to coordinate an audit and how to actually conduct one. We recommend you read all the way through before starting!

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What are marine litter audits and why do we do them?

Greece has a serious problem with plastic pollution, leaking 35 times more plastic into the sea per person than the EU average.

Our team on Paros measured a 5000% increase of waste during tourist season, with a surge in single-use plastics littering the coast.

As part of their Investigate phase, the Paros team conducted marine litter audits to identify the most common (and therefore problematic) plastics, which in turn allowed them to design the most effective solutions.

A marine litter audit is a scientific process that involves:

- Identifying suitable sites
- Engaging your community to take part
- Collecting litter
- Recording the amount, type and location of waste
- Uploading the results via a bespoke app
- Recycling or safely disposing of the beach litter collected.

How many marine litter audits should you conduct?

It's up to you how many marine litter audits you conduct, depending on your resources and volunteer numbers. However, our recommendation is as follows:

Choose at least four sites to audit to gather representative data from across your region.

Conduct audits in the same locations during different seasons (ideally you should audit three or four times a year), to understand how different factors (like wind direction or tourism) affects plastic pollution.

The first marine litter audits you conduct will establish a benchmark. We recommend you repeat the audits every year, both to track your progress and to make sure your interventions are targeting the right items.



How do marine litter audits help find solutions?

Operating as 'citizen scientists', you and your community volunteers will discover and record what kinds of plastic are littering your coast. This will allow you to identify the sources of the plastic pollution, which in turn means you can stop them at source.

Let's look at the work on Paros to show how this works in practice. The marine litter audit on Paros showed the most common items of plastic pollution were cigarette butts, drinking straws and plastic bags. Plastic water bottles were also a problem.

With this information, the team then worked 'upstream' to implement preventative measures.

To reduce the use and littering of plastic bottles, the team ran a communications campaign informing people that the local tap water is safe to drink. [Link to Drink Tap Water]

To reduce the use and littering of plastic straws (and other single-use plastics connected to tourism), the team worked with restaurants and other hospitality businesses to replace single-use plastics with plastic-free alternatives. [Link to Business engagement]

To reduce the littering of cigarette butts, the team installed 'voting bins' that encourage people to dispose of cigarette butts responsibly. [Link to voting ashtrays]

Building your team

Coordinator: as the coordinator, you are responsible for organising and running the marine litter audits. You identify the sites, engage your community, recruit and train volunteers, and run the actual audits. However, you are not alone and will have lots of support to make this all happen!

Supporters and volunteers: Greek people are passionate about the sea, and want to improve their area and protect nature. With the support of the municipality, you will inform local people of this opportunity and inspire them to volunteer as local marine scientists. You may be surprised how many volunteers you attract!

Beach Godparents: We also recommend creating the role of 'Beach Godparent' – this was very successful on Paros. A Beach Godparent is simply a local business, resident or regular visitor who takes responsibility for seasonally auditing their favourite beach. By developing a network of trained and committed volunteers, you will help ensure marine litter audits are conducted regularly and to a high standard.



THE "BEACH GRANDPARENT" GIVES PRIDE
AND OWNERSHIP TK TK TK

Part

01

Preparation & Recruitment

With good preparation, your marine litter audits will be both effective and rewarding for participants and organisers.



- Sites that are convenient to get to will make life easier for your volunteers.
- Be aware that touristy beaches are often cleaned by local businesses, and you might have to ask people to move their beach towels!
- Choose larger beaches to avoid disrupting wildlife.
- On islands, it's best to find beaches facing four different directions.

Step 01

Communications plan and recruiting volunteers

Organise a kick-off event to announce the project and recruit volunteers. Use this event to ensure local people know what's going on and generate support. Use our Engaging Your Community Guide to make a plan that will bring people on board.

Anyone over the age of 18 can volunteer on a marine litter audit. Younger volunteers are more than welcome, if accompanied by an adult. Make it clear that everyone who wants to get involved will receive some training.

Event organising tips

- Start by finding a venue for up to 50 people with seating, toilets and projector facilities.
- Book well in advance if possible.
- Allow two hours for the event itself, plus time to set up.
- Arrange simple, zero-waste catering for the attendees. Expenses should be covered as a donation by the municipality, associations, or local groups.
- We suggest your itinerary includes:
 - Arrivals and introductions.
 - A project presentation.
 - A chance to ask questions.
 - Time for mingling.

Step 02

Site selection

Once you've recruited a few volunteers into your team, it's time to choose where to conduct your first audits. Your volunteer team members can be a big help in choosing the best four locations to audit, so do get them involved.

This table shows the characteristics of an ideal survey site. Matching as many of these criteria as possible will lead to better results.

| GREAT AUDIT SITE | BEST AVOIDED |
|--|--|
| Sandy beach | Rocky bay |
| Flat | Steep |
| Spacious - at least 100m long by 10m wide | Cramped |
| Safe and easy access year-round | Isolated or hard to get to |
| Away from popular venues and archaeological sites | A busy tourist spot near a historic monument |
| Not recently cleaned by a nearby business or clean up scheme | Freshly litter-picked |

Step 03

Schedule training and audit dates

Shape your timeline for events, training and audits. Don't forget to read and include the rest of the preparation steps. Every event you organise makes a good excuse to celebrate progress and attract attention to your project!

The dates of your audits depend on the weather and time of year. We recommend you avoid times when the weather is too hot or too stormy, or the beach too busy. It's also a good idea to be consistent. For example, if you audit at the beginning of the month, try and keep to this schedule each time. You could make it simple and always audit on the same date.

Step 04

Contact the authorities

Inform the local authorities of your plans for each audit location. You may need to request additional waste disposal bins. [\[link\]](#)

Check whether any of the sites are part of the NATURA network.

If so, contact them to see if they have any specific instructions. Finally, notify the coastguard of your scheduled audit dates, and update them if they change. [\[link\]](#)

Step 05

Equip yourself and your volunteers

Run through the equipment checklists below and get hold of the kit you need well in advance. Make sure you communicate the volunteers' checklist below to each team member before every audit.

Kit List

| FOR COORDINATOR TO BRING | FOR VOLUNTEERS TO BRING |
|---|---|
| Burlap bags for all volunteers | Reusable water bottle |
| Non-plastic hardware gloves for everyone | Hat |
| Tape measures to mark out the sampling area and measure items of litter | Sunscreen |
| Charged smartphone with Marine Debris Tracker app installed | Closed shoes |
| The beach form | Raincoat if rain is predicted (rather than an umbrella) |

The Marine Debris Tracker app is a crucial tool for the marine litter audit. You and your team will input information about what you find and upload it to a global database of marine litter which will then be available to scientists for further research.

Download the app and when prompted select the Common Seas - Greece custom list. The 'Getting started with Debris Tracker' [\[link for English and Greek versions\]](#) user guide will show you how it works and there is a tutorial on YouTube [\[link\]](#). We recommend you become confident in using the app before your first marine litter audit.



Notify the Common Seas team when you head out!



Step 06

Risk assessment and first aid

You will need to consider the risks involved in your activities. Think this through in advance, list what might go wrong and how to reduce the risks. Share this information with your volunteers.

You'll find a table with emergency services in the appendix. Please add local phone numbers and print a copy to take with you for every audit.

Step 07

Final preparations

- Check the weather forecast before going out. Decide whether to postpone due to adverse conditions, such as a heat wave, high winds or storms. If you do cancel an audit, notify all volunteers and authorities.
- If the audit is going ahead, confirm with your volunteer team members.
- Check and if necessary, renew all your first aid kit items.
- Notify the Common Seas team.
- Charge your smartphone and check there's enough storage for video.

Preparation checklist

- Communications plan to engage the community
- Preparations for event and training sessions
- Kick-off event
- Site selection
- Schedule training and audit dates
- Equip yourself and volunteers
- Risk assessment and first aid kit
- Final preparations

Part 02

How to conduct a marine litter audit

With good preparation, your marine litter audits will be both effective and rewarding for participants and organisers.

Step 01

Choose your spot and mark the sampling area

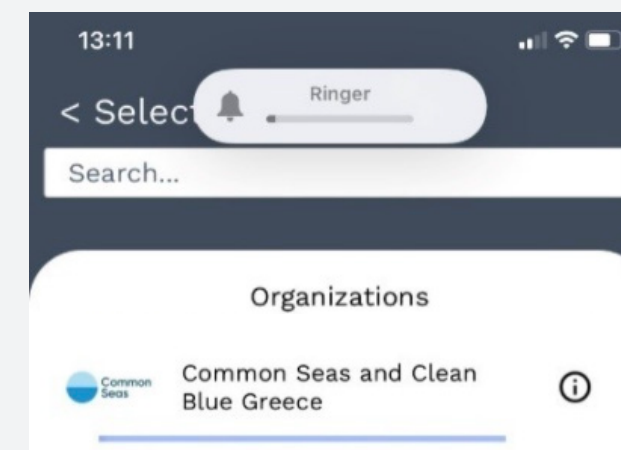
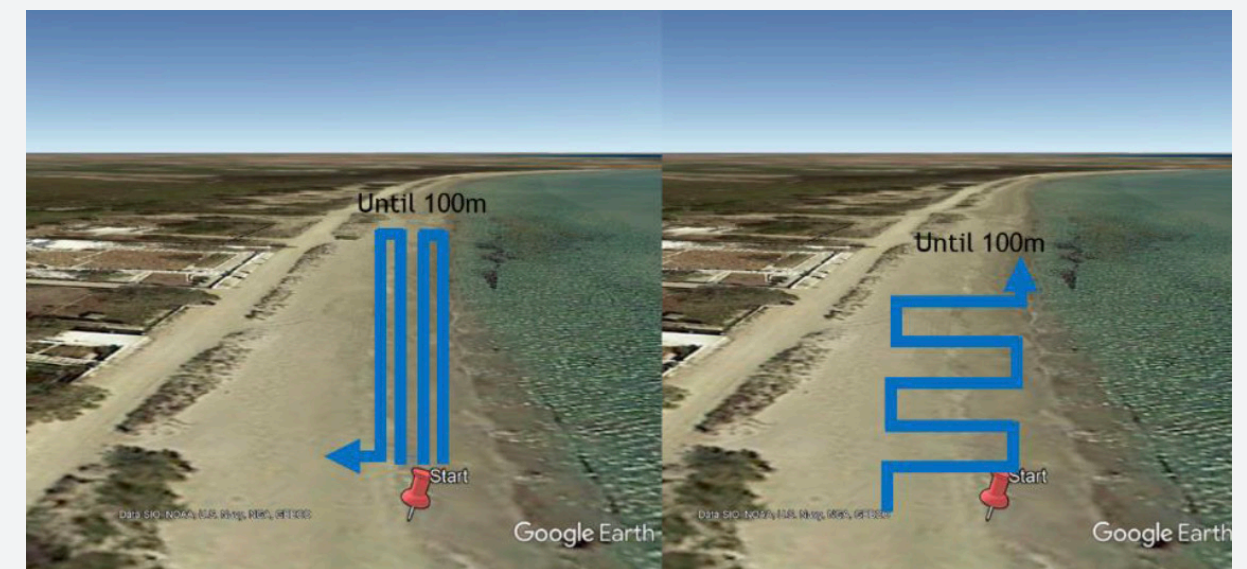
The sampling area is where you will collect the litter items. It needs to be rectangular in shape, 100m long by 10m wide. To measure the 10 metres, start at the water's edge and walk up the beach.

You can mark the border of the sampling unit using sticks. Note the GPS coordinates and details of the sampling area in the appropriate sections of the app.

Step 02

Collect and record items

You and your team should inspect the sampling area by walking in a zig zag pattern perpendicular to the water line.



Work together and use the burlap bags to collect items you find - make sure everyone is wearing protective gloves at all times. You might prefer to collect everything first, then go somewhere more comfortable nearby to sort and list all the items on the Marine Debris Tracker app.

We recommend following the methodology below, which was created by the United Nations Environment Protection Agency.

- **Fill in the beach form with the required information (you'll only have to do this the first time you audit the beach).**
- **Record all items that are longer than 2.5cm. This includes caps and lids, and cigarette butts. No upper size limit is set.**
- **Do not collect any sharp or rusty items. If you find heavy or unusual objects, photograph and record them in notes, and then notify the local authority to dispose of them responsibly.**
- **Include unrecognisable items or things not included in the app's 'Common Seas – Greece' list as 'other' and give a short description. If possible, keep a photo record and notify Common Seas so that we can update our list.**
- **Do not count or collect any natural materials, including animals (dead or alive), nests, driftwood or seaweed.**

Only one person should be using the app to record items. As you do this, the app will automatically note GPS coordinates. Don't worry if you lose your phone signal, you can always input the data and upload them when you get WiFi or network access. Just make sure you note the coordinates of the sampling unit in the beach form, so you can enter this later too.

For safety, everyone should obviously avoid touching their face, eyes and mouth during the audit!

Bonus points: It's a great idea to document your audits with photos and videos for use in social media and press campaigns. Use the hashtags #.....and these keywords:

If you have time, you can even post images while the audit is happening.

Step 03

Disposing of litter

At the end of the audit, please make sure to dispose of all collected litter responsibly.

- Recyclables should be put in the blue bins or separated by type if required.
- Use dedicated bins for glass and fishing gear if they are available in your area.
- General waste goes in the landfill bins

Step 04

Download and interpret your report

A few days after the audit you will be able to download a report from the Marine Debris tracker platform with diagrams showing the types of litter you found.

You and your team can use the Common Seas 'Understand Your Findings' guide [link] and apply your local knowledge to find likely sources of this pollution. You can then make informed decisions about what preventative actions are appropriate in your area. Common Seas has guides on interventions that have proved effective in other locations. [link]

Please share the findings from each audit, and your plans to rectify it, in a mini report for Common Seas using the template provided at the end of this guide.



This project is very media-friendly! Make sure you let your mayor know they can expect positive press coverage from it.

Sharing the findings of your report can be great for attracting media attention, which can help motivate your team and secure ongoing funding.

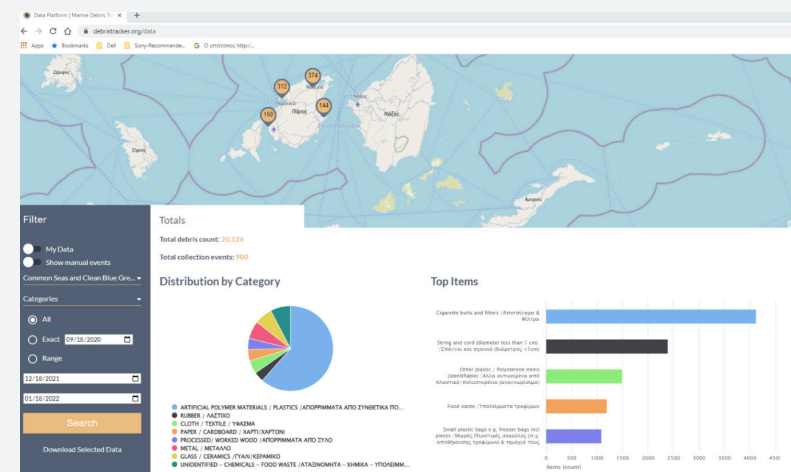
Step 05

Celebrate, and repeat

At this stage you may wish to meet with your team, enjoy some refreshments and reflect on what you have accomplished. Having a good time together will affirm how precious your coastline is to you all and sustain the group through future audits and interventions.

It is important to maintain a schedule and stick to a consistent monitoring process. Soon after collecting your baseline data, agree dates for the next round of audits. The findings from repeated surveys will reveal changes and – we hope – evidence of positive impact from your work.

Thank you for joining us in this shared endeavour to protect our seas from plastic pollution.



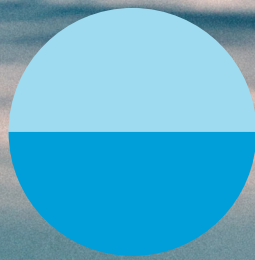
Appendix

First aid kit list

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Paracetamol | Sterile gauze boxes of 5, 10 and 15cm |
| Antihistamine tablets | Triangular bandage |
| Cortisone tablets (prednisolone 4mg) | Bandage 2.50m X 05cm |
| Anti-diarrhoea tablets - Loperamide | Bandage 2.50m 10cm |
| Ophthalmic washing solution | Haemostatic bandage |
| Antihistamine ointment | Antibiotic soaked gauze (Fusidic acid) |
| Ointment for burns | Cotton and disposable cups – paper or plastic |
| Medical gloves | White wound tape roll (width 8cm) |
| Hand disinfectant | Platinum sterilized gauze |
| | 250 or 500ml saline water |
| | Pharmaceutical solution of Hydrogen peroxide |
| | Antiseptic solution |
| | Tongue depressor |

Emergency contact numbers

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Police department Town 1 | |
| Police department Town 2 | |
| Port authority | |
| Coast Guard | |
| Health centre | |
| Medical centre | |
| Emergency services | |
| Fire department | |



CommonSeas



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