

COASTSWEEP GUIDELINES

Cleanup Safety and Proper Materials Handling

Local cleanup coordinators are responsible for providing these instructions to all volunteers before each cleanup. If you have any questions prior to your cleanup, please contact us at coastsweep@mass.gov.

General Safety

1. Work in teams of two or more. All children must be supervised by an adult.
2. Wear gloves and closed-toe shoes at all times and wear adequate clothing and sunblock to prevent sunburn.
3. Avoid over-exertion, heat exhaustion, and dehydration. Come in early at the first sign of fatigue.
4. Do not lift anything too heavy—when in doubt, do not try.
5. Do not touch or pick up animals—alive or dead. See below for additional information on marine mammals and sea turtles.
6. Stay off dunes to prevent erosion and trampling of beachgrass and other vegetation (and to avoid poison ivy).
7. Beware of broken glass, rusty items, and other sharp materials. Handle with extreme care or treat as a hazardous item (see below).
8. **DO NOT touch any hazardous items.** (See below.)

Trash Disposal

Develop a plan to properly dispose of collected trash well in advance of the cleanup. Discuss disposal options with property manager. **DO NOT** dispose of trash bags in full or overflowing trash cans. It may be necessary to bring collected trash home for disposal with your household waste.

What to Pick Up

Only collect human-created items (plastics, metal, glass, food packaging, cigarette butts, etc.). Please see fishing gear section below for new details on fishing gear debris. Sewage treatment disks can be picked up, but use gloves. Natural debris (seaweed, kelp, driftwood, etc.) is part of the natural system and should be left in place. Avoid disturbing plants and animals. **Do not touch any of the hazardous items discussed below.**

Hazardous Items

*The following materials are potentially hazardous and **SHOULD NEVER** be handled by volunteers or local cleanup coordinators. Volunteers should notify the cleanup coordinator about these items, and the coordinator should mark the area and contact appropriate trained personnel. See the **2026 COASTSWEEP Welcome Letter** (sent with supplies) for instructions on identifying the appropriate personnel **BEFORE** the cleanup and having a plan in place for hazardous items.*

- **Syringes/needles**
- **Metal drums**
- **Potentially live fireworks**
- **“Bottle bombs”** (Common household chemicals mixed in plastic bottles can generate a chemical reaction that causes the bottle to explode. Capped plastic bottles with liquid inside [typically brown liquid, sometimes containing bits of aluminum foil or other objects] are potentially hazardous.)

Data Collection

Ocean Conservancy is now collecting data through the Clean Swell mobile app, which is available for Apple and Android phones. Data cards are still available and should be ordered through the Cleanup Coordinator Sign-Up Form. For volunteers planning to use the app, one person on each team should be designated to be the data collector. See the Clean Swell Mobile Application Instructions included with your supplies and have each data collector install the app on their phone. Additional copies of the instructions can be downloaded at: <https://www.mass.gov/media/2318301/download>, or scan the QR Code on the next page with your phone’s camera to open the link.



PLEASE NOTE: To ensure cleanup location is properly saved in the application, please enter all data at cleanup site. If this is not possible, you can select "Record a past cleanup" from the app home page (scroll right). On the first screen you can enter the actual location details.

Stranded Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles

If you find any stranded whales, dolphins, porpoises, or sea turtles (dead or alive), please immediately call the appropriate Massachusetts stranding response agency listed below. Seals on the beach can be a normal occurrence. If seals have any obvious injuries, gunky eyes, or seem underweight, call the appropriate marine animal rescue agency below. For more information, see the **New England Aquarium Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Program website** at:

<https://www.neaq.org/conservation-and-research/studying-and-protecting/sea-turtle-rescue/>.

Turtles

- **Boston to New Hampshire** - New England Aquarium 24-hour Sea Turtle Rescue Hotline at **(617) 973-5247**
- **South Shore, Cape Cod, and the Islands** - Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary at **(508) 349-2615 x6104**

Seals, Dolphins, or Whales

- **Salisbury to Essex** - Seacoast Science Center at **(603) 997-9448**
- **Rockport to Plymouth** - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at **(866) 755-6622**
- **Cape Cod and Southeastern Massachusetts** - International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) at **(508) 743-9548**
- **Martha's Vineyard** - NOAA at **(866) 755-6622**
- **Nantucket** - Marine Mammal Alliance Nantucket at **(833)-667-6626**

Once these response agencies receive your call, they may dispatch field volunteers to collect valuable data. If you need to leave a message, please leave your name, phone number, the type of animal and the condition, and a good description of the location the animal can be found. Thank you very much for your assistance.

Fishing Gear

Updates to state law and regulations now improve our ability to clean up fishing gear debris from our shorelines and coastal waters. This is accomplished principally by differentiating fishing gear from fishing gear debris. Fishing gear is broadly defined as being whole, undamaged, and functioning as intended. For trap/pot gear in the water, it must also be set during an open season and contain certain regulatory components. Anything that does not adequately meet these criteria is fishing gear debris.

Accordingly, any net or pot/trap gear found on the shoreline (i.e., shoreward of mean low water) now constitutes fishing gear debris and may be collected and disposed of, reclaimed, repurposed, salvaged, recycled, or upcycled without any authorization from the Commonwealth. If the gear is potentially usable and identifiable (e.g., presence of buoy with buoy numbers or trap with identification tag), you are encouraged but not obliged to reach out the Division of Marine Fisheries at marine.fish@mass.gov to determine the original owner to allow them to possibly recoup the gear.

This new legal framework also accommodates the cleanup of fishing gear debris in coastal waters (i.e., seaward of mean low water). This type of cleanup effort requires a Special Project Permit from the Division of Marine Fisheries. You may apply for such a permit by e-mail at marine.fish@mass.gov and include a description of when, where, and how the project will be conducted; the relevant expertise of the applicant (or its contractor); how gear will be disposed of; and how gear and user group conflicts will be avoided.