

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER PLASTIC POLLUTION INITIATIVE

CLEAN RIVER, CLEAN SEAS



The Mayors of the Mississippi River, in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme, National Geographic Society and the University of Georgia, launch an initiative to combat plastic pollution along one of the world's greatest waterways.

It is estimated that up to 40% of plastic pollution entering the Gulf of Mexico, and then into the ocean, originates from the Mississippi River.

Working with volunteer citizen scientists from local communities, the initiative will record data on the state of plastic pollution at key sites along the river. This data will be used to generate a 'plastic pollution map' that will help policy makers, business and citizens take action.

TACKLING PLASTIC POLLUTION ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

In September 2018, state legislators and mayors of cities and towns along the Mississippi River made a commitment to reduce plastic waste in the Mississippi River Valley. Under the leadership of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI), mayors invited public and private entities to reduce their plastic use or waste stream by 20% by 2020. To support this goal, a new initiative has been launched to generate a first-ever snapshot of plastic pollution along the river.

The initiative will begin with data collection in three locations (to be selected) along the Mississippi River. The data gathered in these locations will be analyzed to understand the state of plastic litter along the river's banks. It is expected that data collection will then be expanded to many more sites along the river.

The initiative will generate a critical baseline for decision-makers in both the private and public sectors, against which to judge the success of their efforts to reduce plastic pollution flowing into the river. It is also expected to reveal heavy concentrations of the same plastic materials or brands in specific areas.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

The Mississippi River is America's most essential inland waterway, providing hundreds of billions of gallons of water each day to key industries, as well as drinking water to 20 million people in 50 cities in 10 states. The ecology of the river is rich in diversity, supporting the livelihoods of people living along the river as well as a wide range of plant and animal species.

THE PROBLEM

Plastic Pollution is a big problem with impacts reaching far beyond the river valley. Up to 80% of the plastic in the oceans originates from land-based sources, and it is estimated that **up to 40% of plastic pollution** entering the Gulf of Mexico originates from the Mississippi River.

THE SOLUTION

Mayors, researchers, citizens and **local organizations** are coming together to collect data at different points along the river that can be utilized by decision-makers to **inspire and take action**. From schools to businesses, everyone can volunteer to collect data!



CITIZEN SCIENCE AND THE MARINE DEBRIS TRACKER

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The data will be generated through a 'citizen science' approach, enlisting the participation of thousands of community volunteers covering as large an area as feasible along the river.

Participants will be trained in the use of a free mobile phone app for tracking upstream and coastal litter, called the **Marine Debris Tracker**. This app was originally developed by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the University of Georgia. To date, Debris Tracker users have contributed over **3 million items** to an open-data platform.



Participants will use this app to record data on litter at different points along the river, using GPS to log locations. Training will be provided to citizen groups so that data collection is clear and easy, and protocols will be provided to ensure that data collection is safe, including use of facemasks and social distancing. To see a list of participating groups and to access the protocols, visit this website: debristracker.org.

Data collection can also be done by individuals at any time, over the course of a half an hour or a full day.

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