

# Community Litter Hub

Empowering communities to tackle the litter emergency



Find out what one volunteer group did when unusual food items were washing up on their local beach

## East Haven Together case study 1

### Tell us about yourself and/or group

East Haven is a small coastal community on the east coast of Scotland between Carnoustie and Arbroath. National Cycle Network 1 runs right through the village and up the coast attracting thousands of visitors every year. Lynne and Wendy of the village charity, East Haven Together recall that the first formal beach clean was held more than 30 years ago. At that time, residents thought that an annual beach clean event would be enough to keep the coastline in pristine condition. However, one beach clean quickly turned into two, then four and now volunteers are out almost every day of the year removing the vast amounts of marine litter washed up on our beaches.

Those who litter pick regularly know how frustrating it is to litter pick the same area day after day and find the same items again and again. One of the ways in which volunteers maintain their motivation and make the task more meaningful is to obtain data about what is collected and consider where it might have come from. This helps to understand more about the source of litter and makes volunteers feel that there is something which can be done to reduce and prevent it.

We have had several successes and with the help of external agencies have been able to trace certain litter items back to source. We have developed our role from Litter pickers and Citizen Scientists to Citizen Investigators!

### What was the litter problem you wanted to tackle?

In May 2021 litter pickers discovered a large number of metal containers containing rancid food waste along a 7km stretch of beach between Carnoustie and Arbroath. In addition, ten sealed food canisters were washed ashore and two of them were still wrapped in a label from the producer, Mountain Maid. They were dated as being packed on 12 January 2020 and contained a Hot Roll mix. Our online investigations highlighted that this was a yeast based product which would enable bread rolls to be provided to people in an environment where it is difficult to obtain fresh bread supplies. Mountain Maid is a food production company based in North Carolina in the USA. They have a contract to supply the U.S. Defence Logistics Agency Troop Support.

Volunteers then recalled that a large Nato exercise involving international forces had taken place in territorial waters off the Angus coast just a week previously. **We were of the view that we had gathered enough evidence to prove that the waste had been dumped at sea during what was a peacetime exercise.** Consequently, we wanted to understand why the military thought this was appropriate and try to change behaviours.

# East Haven Together case study 1

## What action did you take?

We immediately made contact with statutory agencies but discovered that neither SEPA, Scottish Water nor the Local Authority had any responsibility to investigate the incident. We also established that the Environmental Protection Act 1990 does not apply to the Royal Navy or Visiting forces. Not to be thwarted, we discovered that there are, internationally recognised rules set by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) which governs pollution and the dumping of waste at sea. **These are found in the 'Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter 1972' (MARPOL).**

We contacted the London Office of the IMO and made them aware of the incident and the evidence that we had gathered. They were shocked to find that a small litter picking group from the east coast of Scotland was making contact with them and carrying out investigations into the incident. They said that they did not normally communicate with members of the public.

*On reflection, this response highlights why the public need to make their voices heard and stand up for what we believe to be important in terms of our environment.*

We also learned that the Maritime and Coastguard agency have some responsibility for enforcing the MARPOL regulations so we involved them too.

We carefully managed the waste and retained much of it as evidence.

## Why did you choose to take this particular action?

We feel it is increasingly important for litter picking groups to try and stop littering at source. It's not enough for us to simply carry on picking up litter day on day week in and week out.

*Collecting data about the volume and type of litter we collect helps us to understand more about where litter is coming from in our areas and investigate the more unusual littering incidents.*

The resources section of the Community Litter Hub provides a useful information/legislative base for groups to undertake this kind of work. **Over the last ten years in particular, East Haven has noticed a significant reduction in public littering in the village and this is largely because we are so proactive in not just picking it up but using strategies to prevent it being dropped in the first place.**

# East Haven Together case study 1

## What was the outcome?

We received an acknowledgment from the Royal Navy that we had produced enough circumstantial evidence to prove that the waste had been dumped by Nato war ships exercising in territorial waters. The MARPOL regulations place military ships under an 'obligation' not to dump waste at sea during peacetime.

The Royal Navy subsequently sought permission to use our report and photographic evidence in military training. **This really helps us to feel that all our efforts were worthwhile** and that there is a commitment from the Royal Navy to work with us to improve standards and help to clean our seas.

## Were there any other benefits to your action?

It was a lot of work to carry out the investigation and explore all the legislative responsibilities. However, we learned a lot in the process and raised awareness amongst various organisations and agencies about the work of litter picking groups. It was interesting to note in our web-site analytics that there was a huge spike in interest from Westminster itself at the peak of our investigation. This is likely to be because ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the MARPOL regulations into UK law is a reserved matter for Westminster. **I'm sure they were also wondering who on earth these litter pickers were from the east coast of Scotland!**

## Do you have any advice to others in a similar situation?

This case study highlights that we the public really do have the power to trace litter back to source and hold organisations to account. No matter how small your group you should never doubt your ability to make your voice heard and influence policy locally, nationally and internationally.

**If you have any questions, require any more information or need any assistance regarding communications for the Community Litter Hub, please email:  
[press@keepscotlandbeautiful.org](mailto:press@keepscotlandbeautiful.org).**

**If you have any questions or would like more information on the Community Litter Hub itself, please email:  
[NLFS@keepscotlandbeautiful.org](mailto:NLFS@keepscotlandbeautiful.org).**

