

New cell phone app allows beachgoers to report marine debris

May 17 2011, By Jill Gambill

With summer around the corner, millions worldwide will head to pristine beaches and waterways. However, with items such as bottles, cans and other debris washing up on U.S. shores each year, the University of Georgia and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, have teamed up to create a new, innovative cell phone reporting mechanism to combat the marine debris problem.

The Southeast Atlantic Marine Debris Initiative, or SEA-MDI, housed at UGA and a critical part of a partnership with the NOAA Marine Debris Program, hopes to empower citizens in protecting their beaches and [coastal waters](#) through a newly launched [mobile application](#) that tracks where debris is accumulating.

The tool is important for engaging with beachgoers and stakeholders and is geared at giving the public another way to be a part of the marine debris solution globally, said Jenna Jambeck, assistant professor of environmental engineering in the UGA Faculty of Engineering and one of the [app](#)'s developers.

Available through iTunes and the Android Market, the easy-to-use Marine Debris Tracker app can be downloaded for use on iPhones and Android phones. The simple tool allows users to report and record the type and location of debris through GPS features pre-installed on a [cell phone](#). The data submitted is posted on an interactive website (www.marinedebris.engr.uga.edu) that allows data to be viewed and downloaded for users to design plans to prevent marine debris.

Jambeck said the app is one way the initiative is trying to reach people and raise awareness of marine debris. “If you are noticing marine debris, you are also much less likely to litter,” she said. “While this app collects data, one of its primary goals is to educate the public about marine debris and its harmful impacts.”

“We are very excited about the innovative products that have resulted from our partnership with the University of Georgia,” said David Holst, acting director of the NOAA Marine Debris Program. “This app brings the issue into the forefront and empowers the public to take a proactive step in mitigating the problem.”

Marine debris kills wildlife through ingestion and entanglement. It also can have an economic impact on the tourism industry and other coastal businesses by affecting the aesthetics of beaches and [waterways](#). Jambeck and co-developer Kyle Johnsen, assistant professor of computer systems engineering in the UGA Faculty of Engineering, hope that the Marine Debris Tracker tool will help officials make decisions about how to mitigate marine debris, from supplying more comprehensive waste management, such as trash cans, to providing recycling and disposal opportunities for fishing gear.

SEA-MDI (sea-mdi.engr.uga.edu/) is a new regional partnership between the NOAA Marine Debris Program and a consortium of organizations in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. The initiative aims to create collaborative regional strategies that address [marine debris](#) prevention, reduction and mitigation.

Provided by University of Georgia

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