

## Sea Education Association tall ship departs on major marine debris research cruise

October 2 2012

A tall ship owned and operated by Sea Education Association (SEA) will depart port tomorrow on a research expedition dedicated to examining the effects of plastic marine debris, including debris generated by the 2011 Japanese tsunami, in the ocean ecosystem.

During their 37-day cruise, the crew of the Woods Hole, Mass.-based sailing oceanographic research vessel Robert C. Seamans will explore a region between San Diego and Honolulu, popularly dubbed the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch", where high concentrations of <u>plastic debris</u> accumulate. Floating debris washed to sea by the March 2011 tsunami in Japan will also be drifting in the area, based on predictions from computer models and recent observations.

Updates on scientific findings and notable events will be provided by journalist Jonathan Waterman for National Geographic at http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/ as part of the Society's "Ocean Views" news, and daily on the expedition's website at http://www.sea.edu/plastics, including video footage and slideshows of the region of the North Pacific where SEA scientists expect to find plastic and other floating debris. In addition to measuring plastic debris, scientists onboard the expedition will be studying the communities of organisms living on floating plastic, from microorganisms to larger animals such as <u>barnacles</u> and crabs, to determine whether or not this debris is a vector for invasive or pathogenic species.

"This expedition will be one of the first to unravel the impact that plastic



pollution is having on our ocean's ecosystem. SEA has over 25 years of experience sampling marine debris and, using this knowledge, we will further investigate the health of our marine ecosystem," said Emelia DeForce, the expedition's chief scientist. "Those onboard will have a productive and eye-opening experience with long lasting effects. We will extend this experience to the public at large through our outreach program that will take place during and after the expedition, with the goal to raise awareness of the impact that this long-lived pollutant is having in our oceans."

This expedition, which will follow a 2500-nautical mile cruise track extending more than 1,500 nautical miles west of San Diego, expands upon SEA's 25-year history of measuring plastics, tar, and other <u>marine</u> <u>debris</u> in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It is funded by Sea Education Association, with funding from the Henry L. and Grace Doherty Foundation in support of the web-based and educational outreach programs. Additional support provided by Patagonia and Elemental Herbs.

The SSV Robert C. Seamans is a 134-foot brigantine-rigged sailing oceanographic research vessel. The 38-person crew includes graduate students, educators, an environmental policy analyst, medical professionals, writers, a business professional, scientists, and professional mariners, most of whom are alumni of SEA's core academic program, SEA Semester.

Provided by Sea Education Association

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