

Volunteer Divers Collect Tons of Debris from Catalina Island's Waters

Annual Cleanup Demonstrates Need to Protect the Ocean and Marine Life

AVALON, CA, February 22, 2014 -- In an annual demonstration of the need to protect Catalina Island's waters and marine life, 479 volunteer divers collected debris on Saturday from the bottom of Avalon Harbor as part of the 33rd annual underwater cleanup, supported by the Catalina Island Conservancy Divers support group.

The trash they collected from the ocean floor ranged from tires to cell phones, creating four large piles of debris that dotted the beaches in the midday sun. Among the oddest items the divers recovered were an algae covered chair, thermostat for an engine, plastic green army man and a rusted barbecue. Some of the more valuable discoveries were an assortment of cell phones and glass bottles from the early 1900s.

"As a marine biologist who dives the waters off Catalina, I appreciate the wonderful service that the Catalina Island Conservancy Divers support group and other divers from near and far perform for the good of Avalon Bay, " said Ann Muscat, president and CEO of the Catalina Island Conservancy. "The vast amount of debris collected each year vividly demonstrates the need to protect our oceans and marine life by carefully disposing of trash when we are on the ocean and on land."

Trash dumped into the ocean intentionally or accidentally can harm the marine ecosystem. Marine mammals and other sea life may ingest harmful items or become entangled in debris. The disruption to the food chain can have a lasting impact.

The annual event also helps to remind the many boaters and visitors to the Island about the ramifications of tossing items overboard or carelessly discarding of trash on land. Catalina is California's only destination island, attracting nearly one million people a year. Most arrive by boat. The Island also is a popular dive spot, drawing thousands of divers and snorkelers annually to enjoy the wide assortment of wildlife thriving in its rich kelp forests.

The Catalina Island Conservancy has a long history of protecting and restoring the invaluable natural, cultural and recreational assets of Catalina to keep the Island beautiful and healthy. And through its divers support group, it participates in the annual underwater cleanup to improve the health of Avalon Bay and protect the Island's marine life.

The Catalina Island dive community started the Avalon Underwater Cleanup in the 1970s, and this event is the only time diving is permitted in Avalon Harbor. This combination of a rare diving opportunity for a good cause has made the Avalon Harbor Underwater Cleanup one of the most popular dive events in Southern California.

Divers pick one of four sites to work during the morning the Green Pier, Step Beach, Casino Landing and Lover's Cove.

Registrations to the Annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup benefit the University of Southern California Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber and the Catalina Island Conservancy's Robert E. Given Fund for Ocean Conservation and Educational Outreach. The USC Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber is a 24/7 emergency recompression facility on Catalina that serves thousands of divers who frequent the waters of Southern California.

PHOTOS & CAPTIONS

Image 1



Lulu watches, with owner Becky Williams and friends, as divers collected debris from the bottom of Avalon Harbor and placed them on a blue tarp as part of the 33rd annual underwater cleanup, supported by the Catalina Island Conservancy Divers support group.

Image 2



Diver Jeff Reimer brought a tire up from the bottom of Avalon Harbor as part of the annual underwater cleanup, supported by the Catalina Island Conservancy Divers support group. He said that he rolled it along the bottom of the ocean floor until he could pick it up and walk it to the blue tarp where items were being collected.

Image 3



Diver Jim Melrod said that bringing the solar panel up to shore was difficult because it acted like a kite underwater. He added the panel to the growing pile of debris collected from the annual underwater cleanup, supported by the Catalina Island Conservancy Divers group.

Image 4



All sorts of things were found on the bottom of Avalon Harbor from solar panels to this tiny army man toy held by diver Jordan Kasow. He was one of 479 volunteer divers that participated in the 33rd annual underwater cleanup, supported by the Catalina Island Conservancy Divers group.

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The Catalina Island Conservancy was formed in 1972 and is one of California's oldest land trusts. Its mission is to be a responsible steward of its lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation. The Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Santa Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land deeded to the Conservancy in 1975, 62 miles of rugged shoreline and more than 80 miles of trails. It operates the Airport in the Sky, Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden and two nature centers. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is home to more than 60 plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world. For additional information, visit www.catalinaconservancy.org.