

Marine Debris Work Group

2024 Progress Report

Reporting Period: January 2024 – December 2024

Work Group Webpage:

<https://www.midatlanticocean.org/ocean-planning/work-groups-collaborative-efforts/marine-debris-work-group/>

Work Group Leads:

- Federal: Katie Morgan, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- State: Will Isenberg, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (VCZM)
- Regional: Jes Watts, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)

Work Group Members: Work group membership is open to government and non-governmental entities operating in the five Mid-Atlantic states and the District of Columbia that are willing to participate in work group activities. Members are expected to contribute on monthly work group calls and assist with project implementation.

2024 Member Roster:

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	AFFILIATION
Greg	Atkin	National Aquarium, Baltimore
Joseph	Barnes	Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)
Kathleen	Bergin	DE DNREC
Amy	Bloomfield	NY DEC Div of Materials Management
Avalon	Bristow	Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)
Alli	DePerte	Atlantic Marine Conservation Society (AMSEAS)
Demi	Fox	NOAA Marine Debris Program, Northeast
JoAnn	Gemenden	NJ Clean Communities
Matt	Gove	Surfrider Foundation
Devon	Haines	NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Brittany	Haywood	Delaware Sea Grant
Zach	Huntington	Clean VA Waterways
Will	Isenberg	VA DEQ Coastal Zone Management Program
Cathy	Johnson	National Park Service
Ellen	Keane	NOAA/NMFS/Protected Resources
Alanna	Keating	BOATUS Foundation
John	Kuriawa	NOAA/NOS/Office for Coastal Management

Carly	LaRoche	MARACOOS
Kristi	Lieske	DE DNREC Coastal Management
Christie	Mazzeo-Pfoertner	NY Department of State
Francis	McParland	NY Department of Environmental Conservation
Michael	Moore	BOATUS Foundation
Katie	Morgan	NOAA/ NOS /Marine Debris Program
Donna	Morrow	MD Department of Natural Resources
Swarna	Muthukrishnan	Clean Ocean Action - NJ
Tara	O'Hare	EPA Headquarters, Trash Free Waters
Angela	Padeletti	EPA Region 3 Trash Free Waters
Isha	Patel	NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Casey	Personius	NY Department of Environmental Conservation
Samantha	Pfeffer	NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Steve	Raabe	OpinionWorks, LLC
Marina	Reid	NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Lindsay	Ries	NPS, Coastal Ecology Region 1
Hannah	Sanders	EPA Region 3 Trash Free Waters
Cynthia	Seibold	Balloon Mission
Sheri	Shifren	NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Ellie	Sywak	Atlantic Marine Conservation Society (AMSEAS)
Veronica	Tangiri	Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District

Work Group Description, Goals, and Activities:

MARCO supports regional coordination on marine debris through the Marine Debris Work Group and related activities. The Work Group goal is to bring together regional stakeholders to collectively identify, understand, prevent, and mitigate the impacts of marine debris.

The 2024 Work Plan is in alignment with and corresponds to the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan section, "Healthy Ocean Ecosystem Action 4: Develop a regionally appropriate strategy for marine debris reduction

ACTIVITY 1: Support implementation of the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan.

Expected Completion Date: Ongoing

Progress Period: January 2024 - December 2024

The following activities (Activities 2-9) reflect language from the Action Plan for those actions in which MARCO is listed as a “lead” or “partner” organization. The Work Group reserves the right to change specific metrics and approaches depending upon capacity, funding availability, and MARCO priorities. Additionally, these outcomes could be modified upon review of the recently released NOAA MDP Mid-Plan Review Report.

Action
1.1.1.3 (Lead) - By the end of 2026, support outreach, advocacy, and education campaigns based on community-based social marketing techniques to prevent the intentional release of balloons using strategies developed with regional partners and promoted through preventballoonlitter.org .
1.2.1.1 - Each year of the Action Plan, compile existing consumer debris research on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaboration Portal to enable analysis of information gaps, best practices, and available resources.
1.2.1.2 - By the end of 2026, promote consumer debris research by conducting stream, river, and shoreline monitoring surveys, monitoring study sites, promoting citizen science, and collecting stormwater data to better inform decision-makers and raise public awareness.
1.2.2.1 - By the end of 2026, analyze the effectiveness of community-based social marketing techniques and behavior change campaigns to target, inform, transfer, and influence at least three consumer debris campaigns that are inclusive of the Mid-Atlantic regional community.
2.1.1.1 - By the end of 2026, promote at least 10 new outreach products to be shared at targeted outreach events to engage the public and recreational fishing and boating communities in derelict gear prevention. Make them available online for diverse audiences through the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaboration Portal and other platforms.
2.1.1.3 - By the end of 2026, develop and share at least five new outreach products on proper disposal and recycling of monofilament line to fishers, boaters, and the general public, and build at least 10 new private partnerships on recycling monofilament line and soft bait.
3.1.1.1 - By the end of 2026, create and implement at least 15 outreach products and/or education campaigns that are relevant to or could be replicated across the region that raise awareness of microplastic and microfiber issues among Mid-Atlantic residents as an initial step to lead to long-term changes in behavior, and make them available on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaboration Portal and other platforms.

3.2.1.1 - Each year of the Action Plan, share microplastic data, research, best practices, literature, resources, and funding sources on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaboration Portal.

3.2.1.2. By the end of 2026, conduct at least one microplastic and microfiber research webinar to share data and detection strategies and to discuss best practices to promote future research in the region.

4.2.1.1 - By the end of 2023, identify opportunities to create state inventory programs and identify derelict vessel hotspots with state and local authorities and share resources with the Mid-Atlantic community.

4.5.1.1 - By the end of 2026, document the successful techniques and legislative approaches of at least five federal, state, and local agencies to share lessons learned on ADV removal, disposal options, and prevention approaches, and explore opportunities for new legislation.

Progress for Activity 1 noted, by action, in each activity below.

ACTIVITY 2: Develop Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) campaigns that will be implemented in subsequent years.

Expected Completion Date: December 2024

Progress Period: January 2024 - June 2024

During this reporting period, the key deliverable has been the development and implementation of a comprehensive baseline general population survey representing the five states of the MARCO region. Conducted in April 2024, the survey comprised 2,294 interviews with randomly selected adult residents. It covered a range of topics related to the project's focus behaviors, including perceptions, attitudes, barriers, motivators, and relevant public policy questions.

Throughout this process, the Marine Debris Workgroup has been engaged during their monthly meetings as key stakeholders and co-designers of the research. A dedicated task force within the workgroup has actively shaped and planned this initiative between meetings. Plans for this work were shared at the December 2023 Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Summit, and initial findings were presented at the May 2024 Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum.

As the reporting period concluded in May, preparations began for upcoming focus groups scheduled for July. These groups will expand upon the survey findings, specifically exploring barriers and motivators related to bottled water usage. They will also test various Community Based Social Marketing interventions aimed at informing future public outreach and engagement efforts.

The **water refill station campaign** continued to address barriers to reusable water bottle use. MARCO extended campaign support by supplying water bottle refill station equipment to an additional 12 waterfront recreational areas, prioritizing locations in underserved communities. Each site will monitor and report water usage for the duration of the project.

This activity supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 1.2.2.1, which states, "By the end of 2026, analyze the effectiveness of community-based social marketing techniques and behavior change campaigns to target, inform, transfer, and influence at least three consumer debris campaigns that are inclusive of the Mid-Atlantic regional community."

This activity also supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 2.1.1.3, which states, "By the end of 2026, develop and share at least five new outreach products on proper disposal and recycling of monofilament line to fishers, boaters, and the general public, and build at least 10 new private partnerships on recycling monofilament line and soft bait."

This activity also supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 3.1.1.1, which states, "By the end of 2026, create and implement at least 15 outreach products and/or education campaigns that are relevant to or could be replicated across the region that raise awareness of microplastic and microfiber issues among Mid-Atlantic residents as an initial step to lead to long-term changes in behavior, and make them available on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaboration Portal and other platforms."

Progress Period: July 2024 - December 2024

Completed CBSM barriers research and initiated campaign strategy development based on research results: [OpinionWorks video summary of survey results](#)

OpinionWorks conducted focus groups for CBSM research to explore strategies for reducing disposable plastic water bottle use and promoting the adoption of refillable bottles. During this reporting period, sub-groups of the Marine Debris Working Group (MDWG) met to analyze survey findings and explore barriers and motivators related to bottled water usage and the responsible disposal of small-scale fishing gear. OpinionWorks convened an additional focus group (currently in progress) to test refined water bottle debris messaging and materials. Additional focus groups for other debris types are scheduled for early 2025. These discussions will help shape Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) interventions for future public outreach and engagement.

The [water refill station campaign](#) continued its efforts to reduce single-use plastic by addressing barriers to reusable water bottle use. MARCO expanded the campaign by installing additional water bottle refill stations at waterfront recreational areas, prioritizing underserved communities (see supporting documents). These stations will track water usage and provide valuable data to evaluate the campaign's effectiveness.

These activities have contributed to the development of data-driven CBSM strategies that will guide future outreach efforts and promote responsible environmental practices.

ACTIVITY 3: Conduct a comprehensive marine debris policy assessment that enables informed decision-making and targeted policy development.

Expected Completion Date: December 2024

Progress Period: January 2024 - June 2024

OpinionWorks LLC conducted a regional survey to gauge public support for new laws and policies targeting marine debris sources. The results were presented at the 2024 Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum, where federal, state, municipal, and local agencies discussed lessons learned and insights into these policies. This discussion was part of a broader marine debris session. A final report and synthesis will be provided upon completion of the qualitative (interview and focus group) phase of the project.

This activity supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 1.2.2.1, which states, "By the end of 2026, analyze the effectiveness of community-based social marketing techniques and behavior change campaigns to target, inform, transfer, and influence at least three consumer debris campaigns that are inclusive of the Mid-Atlantic regional community."

Progress Period: July 2024 - December 2024

Completed. OpinionWorks completed a [final report](#) and synthesis of the marine debris policy assessment, and presented it to the Marine Debris Work Group.

This activity supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 1.2.2.1, which states, "By the end of 2026, analyze the effectiveness of community-based social marketing techniques and behavior change campaigns to target, inform, transfer, and influence at least three consumer debris campaigns that are inclusive of the Mid-Atlantic regional community."

ACTIVITY 4: Plan and host biennial Regional Marine Debris Summits in 2025 and 2027.

Expected Completion Date: Ongoing

Progress Period: January 2024 - December 2024

This activity begins in 2025

ACTIVITY 5: Implement Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) campaigns that were developed in 2024. **(NEW)**

Expected Completion Date: N/A

Progress Period: January 2024 - December 2024

This activity begins in 2025

ACTIVITY 6: Conduct a series of information sessions or webinars to provide the work group and others with education and insights into micro-level marine debris issues. **(NEW)**

Expected Completion Date: Ongoing

Progress Period: January 2024 - June 2024

Work Group leadership drafted and disseminated a Request for Qualifications for a Microplastics Fellowship. The deadline for submissions was June 30th, resulting in a total of 18 applicants. The selected fellow will play a pivotal role in supporting the Work Group's efforts, particularly in hosting quarterly information sessions.

Important dates:

- Application Deadline: June 30th 2024, at 11:59 pm ET.
- Notification of Acceptance: by August 1, 2024.
- Fellowship Start Date: September 1, 2024.
- Fellowship Performance Period: September 1, 2024, through August 31, 2025.

This activity supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 3.2.1.1, which states, "Each year of the Action Plan, share microplastic data, research, best practices, literature, resources, and funding sources on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaboration Portal."

This activity supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 3.2.1.2, which states, "By the end of 2026, conduct at least one microplastic and microfiber research webinar to share data and detection strategies and to discuss best practices to promote future research in the region."

Progress Period: July 2024 - December 2024

Selected a Marine Debris Fellow from a pool of 18 applicants. In collaboration with MDWG, the fellow will develop and execute a series of webinars featuring researchers and experts in the microplastics field. These webinars, aligned with NOAA's Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, will address microplastics research, impacts, and mitigation strategies.

MARCO Microplastics Fellow developed a draft framework for the 2025 microplastics webinar series, and began speaker outreach for each of the four topic areas. Speakers have been confirmed for the first webinar (microfibers), which is scheduled for mid-to-end January 2025.

This activity supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 3.2.1.1, which states, "Each year of the Action Plan, share microplastic data, research, best practices, literature, resources, and funding sources on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaboration Portal."

This activity supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 3.2.1.2, which states, "By the end of 2026, conduct at least one microplastic and microfiber research webinar to share data and detection strategies and to discuss best practices to promote future research in the region."

ACTIVITY 7: Improve regional capacity for prevention and large scale removal of Abandoned and Derelict Vessels (ADV) **(NEW)**

Expected Completion Date: N/A

Progress Period: January 2024 - December 2024

This activity begins in 2025. Drafted an RFQ for a CBSM Contractor related to this activity

ACTIVITY 8: Update Projects Database in the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Collaborative Portal.

Expected Completion Date: Ongoing

Progress Period: January 2024 - December 2024

Coordinating with Northeast NOAA Marine Debris Program Coordinator to update [Projects Database](#)

This Activity supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 1.2.1.1, which states: "Each year of the Action Plan, compile existing consumer debris research on the Mid-A Marine Debris Collaboration Portal (Collaboration Portal) to enable analysis of information gaps, best practices, and available resources."

ACTIVITY 9: Conduct bi-annual assessments of balloon and other debris.

Expected Completion Date: Ongoing

Progress Period: January 2024 - June 2024

Monitoring occurred on 1-mile stretches of beaches in each of the five Mid-Atlantic states. Staff and volunteers collect data on the number and types of balloons identified as well as other types of debris. The data is summarized and presented on the [Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal](#). This data has been used to inform future marine debris efforts including the current water bottle CBSM project (Activity 2). The data summary from the reporting period is provided below.

State	Total non-balloon debris pieces collected in Winter/Spring 2024	Total balloon debris pieces collected in Winter/Spring 2024
Virginia	829	116
Maryland	987	85

Delaware	415	14
New Jersey	162	1
New York	617	93

This Activity also supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 1.2.1.2, which states: "By the end of 2026, promote consumer debris research by conducting stream, river, and shoreline monitoring surveys, monitoring study sites, promoting citizen science, and collecting stormwater data to better inform decision-makers and raise public awareness." MARCO will continue soliciting updates on shoreline monitoring surveys from Work Group members, and adding projects to the Collaboration Portal.

Progress Period: July 2024 - December 2024

Developed a streamlined [Prevent Balloon Litter Engagement Reporting Form](#)

Monitoring occurred on 1-mile stretches of beaches in each of the five Mid-Atlantic states. Staff and volunteers collect data on the number and types of balloons identified as well as other types of debris. The data is summarized and presented on the [Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portal](#). This data has been used to inform future marine debris efforts including the current water bottle CBSM project (Activity 2). The data summary from the reporting period is provided below.

State	Total non-balloon debris pieces collected in Fall 2024	Total balloon debris pieces collected in Fall 2024
Virginia	2073	175
Maryland	344	9
Delaware	434	3
New Jersey	1090	193

New York	1935	162
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This Activity also supports progress on the Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan, Action 1.2.1.2, which states: "By the end of 2026, promote consumer debris research by conducting stream, river, and shoreline monitoring surveys, monitoring study sites, promoting citizen science, and collecting stormwater data to better inform decision-makers and raise public awareness." MARCO will continue soliciting updates on shoreline monitoring surveys from Work Group members, and adding projects to the Collaboration Portal.

