

Vieques Beaches Under Assault Again!

No, the Navy is not running maneuvers, we're doing it to ourselves.

In the last several years, public awareness of the beach litter problem and the need to prevent garbage from being washed into our oceans has increased dramatically. Through organized beach cleanup days and efforts from throughout the community, regular beach trash has been reduced significantly. This major improvement has not been matched in the area of "extraordinary" beach garbage.

Extraordinary beach garbage is the result of storm runoff and greatly exceeds the volume of trash left behind by beach goers. During torrential downpours, water from everywhere ends up in the arroyos and then flows into the ocean. Much is carried out to sea to litter the bottom and run afoul with various sea creatures, while a certain percentage is washed back up onto the beaches. This is most notable on the north side of the island, but Sunbay and other south side venues receive a small percentage as well.

We have ravines lined with homes that begin high in the hills of both Monte Santo and Florida. They meet midway and form the major arroyo that crosses route 200 between the gas stations. With major rains (several times per year) the flow down this waterway carries everything from plastic bags to refrigerators. The flow of garbage is almost incomprehensible. The beaches end up becoming garbage dumps. Cleanup by hand and plastic bag takes several man weeks. Some objects are so heavy that they cannot be carried by one person. What are the sources of this trash?

Anything in the street. Ultimately, the water flowing into or onto the streets washes into the ocean. How does trash get into the street?

- Trash thrown or dropped into or next to the street;
- Trash in parking lots;
- Garbage cans – overflowing and/or tipped over;
- Garbage in yards that washes into the street.

Anything next to the arroyo. It all flows down hill!

- Trash thrown or dropped into or next to the arroyo;
- Garbage cans – overflowing and/or tipped over near an arroyo;
- Garbage in yards near the arroyo.

The solution is simple, resolve is more difficult. The community must become more responsible. We need to be good citizens. Commercial entities need to be diligent about cleanup. Residents need to keep their garbage areas and yards free of trash. We've all seen messes strewn across various parking lots as well as homes with garbage just piled up. While this is totally unacceptable, people's attitudes must change. We all have to "pitch in."

While we're at it, wouldn't it be really helpful if the men that assault the beaches in dump trucks to steal sand (the police won't touch them and DNER folks don't work after 5:00) would volunteer to take some of the larger trash items with them when they leave?