

Stormwater tip – December 2016

Something we rarely consider is the effect litter and trash has on wildlife. Many wild animals have been displaced into developed areas due to shrinking habitats, often searching trash for food. As a result, it is becoming more common to have animals experiencing razor-sharp injuries from cans, entanglements in six-pack plastic rings, and stomachs filled with plastic bags.

We think it's okay to throw apple cores and other compostable food out of our car window, never considering it's actually drawing animals who might then get hit by a car. Deceased animals on our roadways become pollutants to our storm sewer systems.

The exact number of trash-related fatalities among ocean species is unknown; but we do know that stranded whales, turtles, dolphins, and manatees have been found with plastic bags in their stomachs or dead from entanglement. Cigarette butts contain nicotine and are toxic when ingested by marine animals. Animals end up eating a lot of them because they look like fish eggs when the outer wrapping unravels, and they can fill up the animal's stomach and remain undigested.

What can we do to help? Please keep trash securely in cans with lids, and on windy days, be especially aware. If you see trash and litter, please pick it up. Don't fly balloons as they often are found miles from their starting point, floating on water bodies where they are ingested by marine life. Use reusable shopping bags to reduce the amount of plastic placed into the trash stream. Washing recyclable containers before putting them out at the curb will help reduce critters' interest.