

State of our beaches

Beachwatch report



2024

Thank you to everyone who took part in, or organised, a beach clean last year.

More than **15,000 volunteers** completed over **1,200 litter surveys**, allowing us to identify common litter items, pollution sources and trends, and use this evidence to push for change.

Across the UK and Channel Islands, volunteers removed over **764,000 litter items** from our beaches, weighing more than **16,800kg**! Overall, we saw a **9.5% increase in plastic litter** compared to 2023, highlighting the urgent need to cut down our plastic consumption.

In 2024, we received more litter surveys than ever before. It's wonderful to see the ever-increasing passion and support for our Beachwatch programme to make our coasts cleaner, healthier and safer for everyone.

Last year's litter data fed into the disposable cup consultation in Scotland and in our campaigning for **Deposit Return Schemes (DRS)** – which England and Northern Ireland have now passed legislation to start implementing. In Wales, the data highlighted the need to include glass in its DRS, which it is hoping to do.

Why not send a copy of this report to your local politician and ask them what action they're taking to tackle litter pollution?



For a breakdown of our litter data and what this tells us about the state of our beaches, scan the QR code here:
actmcs.org/beachwatch24-rp



In 2024...

15,168 volunteers got involved in beach cleans.

Volunteers removed **764,451 litter items** from the coast.

92 miles of beach were cleaned across the UK and Channel Islands.

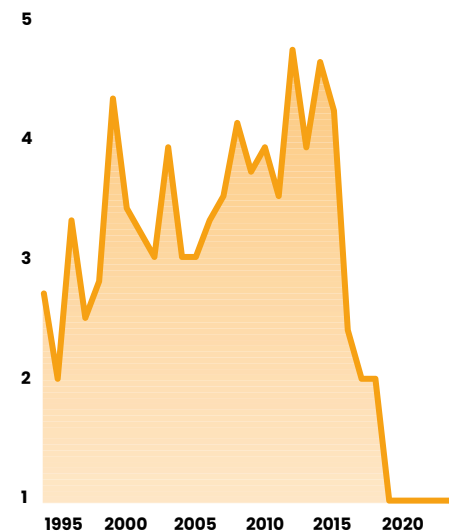
17 tonnes of litter was removed from our beaches.

Volunteers spent **24,407 hours** cleaning and recording litter on beaches.



Carrier bag charge success

Since the introduction of carrier bag charges, we have seen a really positive difference on our coastline, with data gathered by volunteers showing an **80% decrease of plastic carrier bags found on our beaches!** This highlights the power of policies and behaviour change in reducing our single-use plastic consumption.



Average number of plastic bags per 100m of beach found in the UK between 1994 and 2024

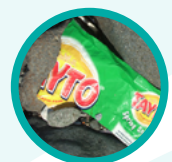
The UK and Channel Islands' 2024 beach litter story

What did we find?

On average, **170** litter items were found per 100m on UK and Channel Island beaches, an increase of **↑ 1.8%** from 2023



↑ 1. Plastic pieces (2.5-50cm)



↔ 2. Packets



↑ 3. Caps and lids



↑ 4. Plastic string/cord (0-1cm)



↑ 5. String/cord/rope (1cm+)

Litter sources



34.2% - Non-sourced

We're not sure where these items are from – usually because they're too tiny to identify



46.2% - Public

Items that end up on the beach because of the public, such as litter that's thrown away, or items left on the beach



12.0% - Fishing

Things that help anglers and commercial fishers catch seafood, like lobster pots and fishing nets



4.9% - Shipping

Items lost or thrown overboard from small craft or massive ships.



2.3% - Sewage-related debris

Items flushed down the toilet that should go in the bin.



0.4% - Fly-tipped

Large items like TVs and tyres.

Source to Sea Litter Quest

Despite living inland, **664** of you did something amazing for our ocean by taking part in our Source to Sea Litter Quest.

417 bags of litter were collected weighing **1404kg**

Single-use plastics made up **four of the top five** items

13,326 items were removed from our towns, parks and rivers



Plastic accounted for **72%** of all recorded litter items



91% of cleans recorded plastic bottles and lids



80% of cleans found glass bottles – **627** in total

The need for a Circular Economy

The amount of plastic found on beaches increased by **9.5%** between 2023 and 2024. The continued presence of plastics on our coastline highlights the need for a circular economy in which consumers have more options and access to use refillable and reusable products.

Beachwatch data has already been used by governments across the UK as evidence to introduce litter reducing policy – such as the carrier bag charges and bans on certain single-use plastics, such as straws, cutlery, plates and bowls, and the recent UK-wide commitment to ban plastic wet wipes.



What is a Circular Economy?

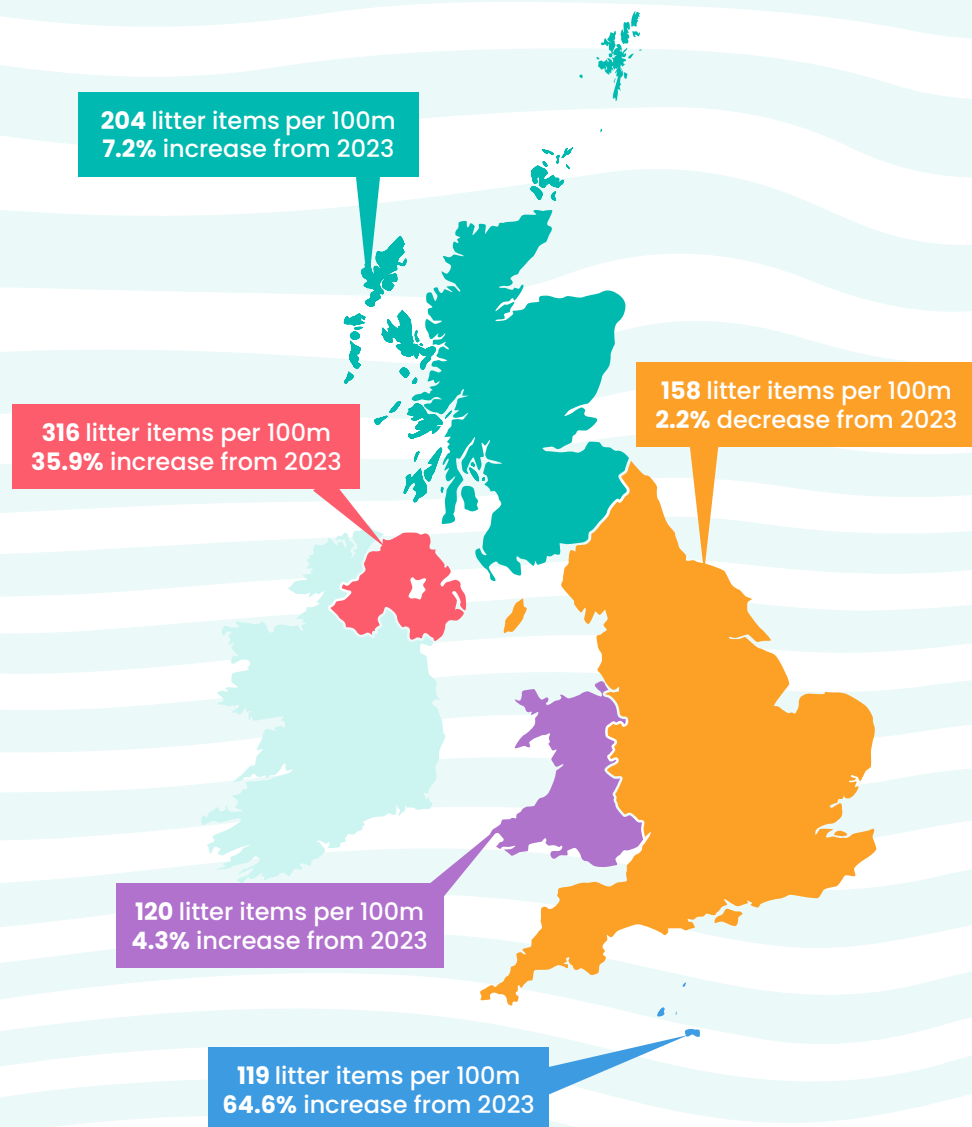
Our economy is mostly a make-use-throw-away model, but we need to shift to a circular one in which the things we use are designed to be reused, repaired or repurposed. This would reduce pollution and our burden on the planet.

Our data shows that these policies work to reduce plastic pollution on our beaches. We now need UK governments to accelerate work to introduce more circular economy solutions, such as deposit return schemes, and support for a shift to reuse and refill. You can do your bit by reducing, reusing and recycling as much as possible.



Join us today and together we can do even more to help fight pollution – www.mcsuk.org/join-us

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Get involved!

Join or organise a beach clean

Our **beach cleans** and litter surveys happen all year round. Check whether there's one happening near you – if not, why not organise your own? We provide the resources and training you need to get started.

If you can't get to the beach, don't worry – you can still do your bit and help prevent litter reaching our coast. By taking part in a **Source to Sea** litter quest you'll be recording and clearing pollution from inland spaces, stopping it from entering our waterways and helping to build a bigger picture of pollution in UK seas.

If you're looking for a team building or volunteering day for your company, why not join our experts on a beach clean for a day of fun, while doing something worthwhile for the environment? Our **team beach cleans** are a fun and fulfilling day out for you and your team.

Head to mcsuk.org/beach-cleans to find out more.

Become a member of the Marine Conservation Society

By pledging your ongoing support, you make our hands-on conservation work possible. Join our community of ocean enthusiasts from as little as £5 per month – £6 could support a beach cleaning volunteer. Join us at mcsuk.org/join



Registered with



The Marine Conservation Society's beach litter work is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery



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