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State Water Resources Control Board

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RESEARCH TO PREVENT COASTAL WATER POLLUTION GETS NEARLY $500,000 STATE WATER BOARD GRANT

SANTA BARBARA --The State Water Resources Control Board has awarded a $482,182 grant to a foundation that will research the problem of microscopic plastic debris in the Pacific Ocean. The project is part of the Davis Administration's efforts to keep California's waters clean, funded through the Water Bond of 2000.

Governor Gray Davis championed the Water Bond of 2000 (Proposition 13), which led the drive to authorize $2 billion in funding for clean water and safe parks. Projects funded by Proposition 13 support safe drinking, water quality, flood protection and water reliability projects throughout California. Proposition 13 provided $695 million for water quality projects.

With this Proposition 13 grant, the Algalita Marine Research Foundation will study how trash, plastics, and minute debris hurt the beneficial uses of the Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River watersheds, as well as other watersheds in California's urban areas.

Land-based sources of plastic and trash, especially in urban areas of Southern California, are the most significant source of marine debris in Southern California coastal waters. The recently approved zero trash Total Maximum Daily Load for the Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River watersheds focuses on the large debris, however, recent studies conducted by the Algalita Marine Research Foundation and the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) suggest that plastic fragments less than 5mm in size occur in a mass six times higher than the mass of plankton in the mid-Pacific Gyre and, in near coastal waters of Southern California, the average mass of plastic is two and a half times greater than that of plankton.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) plastic pellets are "the raw materials that are melted and molded to create plastic products…and may be formed into pellets of various shapes. These pellets were found to be the most abundant debris collected in a study of beach sites from Seal Beach to San Clemente in Orange County and the most abundant debris item found during EPA's Harbor Studies Program (94% of all debris collected). More recently, research has focused on the impacts of plastics on human health, including the human reproductive impacts of hormone disrupting chemicals found in plastics.

The Algalita Foundation plans to study the following:

- Exploring the sources of plastic and debris loading in inland rivers of urban areas of California,
- Determining the baselines for the loading of pellets and other plastic and anthropogenic debris in these rivers,
- Establishing baselines for the quantity of these pollutants deposited by inland sources on beaches and in adjacent coastal waters
- Determining whether the current nonpoint source plans for urban runoff are adequate to control trash and other anthropogenic debris impacting inland and coastal resources.

The state's long-term goals encourage public policy-makers, local governments, industry, and the general public to reduce the sources of plastics and trash discharges. Developing source reduction strategies that go beyond trapping and catch basins and beyond industrial housekeeping practices will prevent pollution before it occurs.

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