

150 m of Melbourne's Beach

By Ross Headifen

To those who think Melbourne's beach plastic pollution is under control, then think again. These photos were taken along just 150 m of beach front in Middle Park in Feb 2011. The photos mainly concentrate on plastic bottles as they are the biggest items that stand out.



Plastic Bottles Collection from Just 150 m of Beach. This meant a plastic bottle on the beach every 3 m.

However, in addition to these, there is a whole mess of other small plastic items such as straws, bottle caps, plastic cups, bait bags and other plastic bags and wrappers. These are primarily disposable one-off use plastic items which provide insight as to how to stop the problem they cause. It is worth seeing some of the individual pictures of how these items are scattered around on our beaches to see the real problem we have. Below is a collage of these pictures.



Two Bottles



Four Bottles



Two Bottles



Bait Bag



Water Bottle



Drink Bottle



Water Bottle



Water Bottle & Straw



Bottle & Straws



Drink Bottle Big M



Drink Bottle



Milk Bottle



Oil Bottle & Straw



Two Bottles& Polystyrene



Two Bottles& Spray can



Water Bottles & Plastic Trash



Water Bottles & Plastic Trash



Plastic Lids & Plastic Trash



Water Bottle



Plastic Cup



Plastic Food Container,
Straws & Trash



Plastic Bottles &
Plastic Trash from
Stormwater Drain



Plastic Bottles &
Plastic Trash from 2nd
Stormwater Drain



Plastic Cutlery, Straws
and other Plastic Trash

Readers ought to be appalled at the plastics litter problem on our city beaches. This particular short section of beach has plastic trash coming to it from three sources;

- 1) Washed in from Port Phillip Bay, as the trash probably has come down the Yarra River.
- 2) Washed in from the storm water drains. No litter traps are evident.
- 3) People uneducated about our burgeoning plastics problem leaving trash on the beach.

It should be noted that this is not just a Melbourne problem. Visits to beaches around the Western World show similar plastic trash problems, with the same types of plastics ending up on our beaches.

Consider Melbourne with its population of 3 million people. If only one person in 3000 dropped a plastic drink bottle a day, that's 1000 bottles a day ending up, in the Yarra, in the ocean, on the beaches or in the parks.

Australians consumed 550 million liters of bottled water a year in 2005¹. If the assumption is made that they were half liter size bottles, then that's over 1 billion bottles consumed in that period. Only 35% of bottles are recycled, the rest go to landfills or end up as litter. In the USA (which is a much larger economy but with similar plastic trash issues) in 2008, one organisation alone picked up 189 million plastic bottles from roadsides, waterways and parks². The energy required to produce a 600ml bottle of water is about 7 times as much energy needed for the same volume of water from a tap³. The plastic water bottles are becoming a major environmental hazard. They require valuable fuels to manufacture. They also create mountains of rubbish when they are thrown away. Over a third of total litter volume is drink bottles.

Plastic is clearly the most destructive form of litter in Australia as it is very long lasting and has the potential to harm marine and terrestrial life. PET drink bottles, bottle caps and lids plus chips/confectionery bags were the dominant plastic items found in Clean Up Australia Day 2010⁴. Of that plastic bottles made up about one third of all the plastic waste reported.

Our government needs to understand this eco-damaging road we are on with plastic drink bottles. Only once they realise that setting up an appreciable bottle refund scheme, paid for by the bottle manufacturer, will this plastic bottle litter problem go away. Surely the bottle manufacturers have some ownership of the pollution and wildlife problem they are creating with their products? A refund scheme will drive recycling efficiency from 35% to a much higher level and save the greenhouse emissions by not producing all these new bottles. South Australia has a 10 cent refund scheme, but is 10 cents enough to make someone go out of their way to get the refund? Litter analysis results show an approximate 30% difference in bottle content between SA and other states.

A number of solutions similar to the above can be offered for each of these sources to significantly reduce this plastic problem. Some solutions require local council control, whereas others require action on a larger scale by the city and even the state. Working together, these authorities have the ability to bring the beauty back to Victorian beaches and public areas again and put sustainability into plastic trash management.

References:

- 1) <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/bottled-water-the-new-ecodisaster/2006/02/25/1140670303250.html>
- 2) <http://earth911.com/recycling/plastic/plastic-bottle-recycling-facts?>
- 3) <http://www.aquamaker.com.au/content/news.php>
- 4) Clean Up Australia Day 2010 Rubbish report