



# 2021 Marine Debris Online Survey Results

Leah Gillespie

Research Assistant

Cape Breton Environmental Association

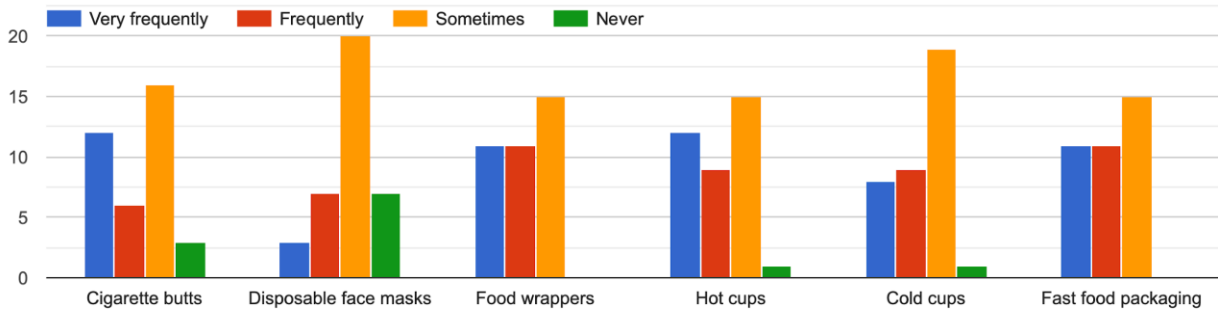
July 2021

Marine debris is defined by the NOAA as “any persistent solid material that is manufactured or processed and directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, disposed of or abandoned into the marine environment or the Great Lakes.”

The goal of our 2021 Marine Debris Survey was to gain further insight into the marine debris being found by organizations, groups, and individuals in Atlantic Canada. The survey received 37 responses, 21 of these responses were from a member of a community group or organization. All the survey responses were within Nova Scotia, with the exception of 1 response from Grande Digue, New Brunswick and 1 response from Prince Edward Island. 10 responses were within Cape Breton, 3 were within Halifax, 5 were within Kings County, 4 were within Lunenburg, 1 was from the Annapolis Valley, 1 was from Pictou County, 1 was from Victoria County, 1 was from Unama’ki, and 9 responses were from an unknown municipality in Nova Scotia. Approximately 65% of these surveyors visit shorelines at least once a week.

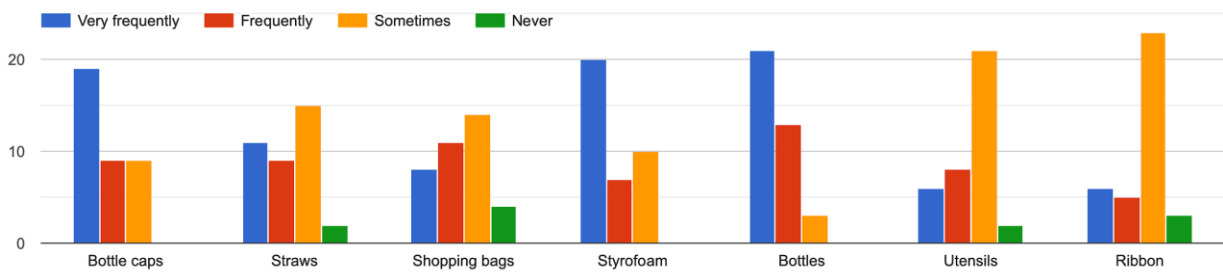
This survey asked, “How often do you see these materials on shorelines?” for four separate categories; miscellaneous, plastic, metal, and fishing related items. The surveyors then rated how often they see the items on shorelines, ranging from never to very frequently.

How often do you see these materials on shorelines?



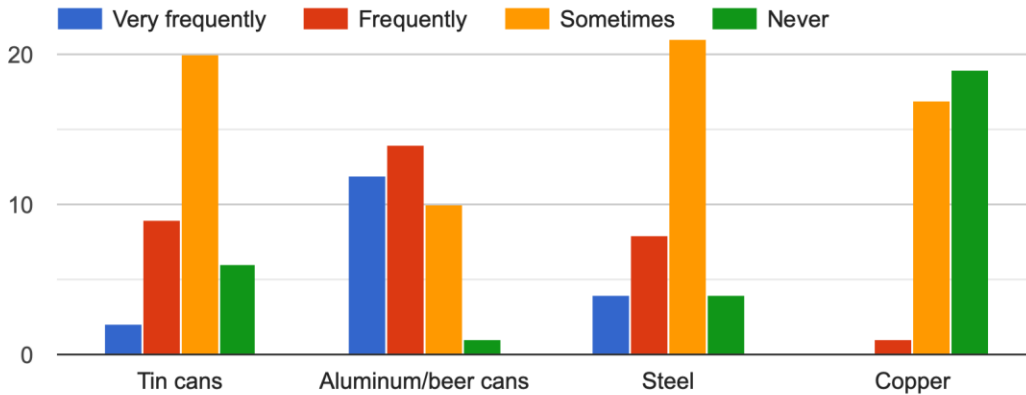
The miscellaneous category included cigarette butts, disposable face masks, food wrappers, hot cups, cold cups and fast-food packaging. 32% of surveyors see cigarette butts and hot cups very frequently, 29.7% see food wrappers and fast-food packaging very frequently.

How often do you see these plastics on shorelines?



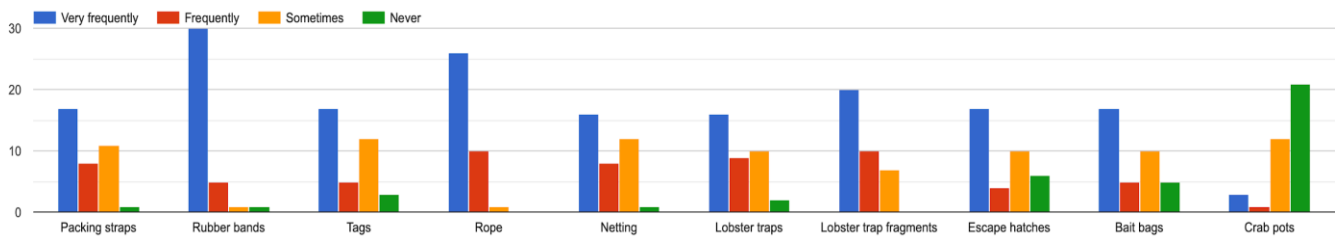
The plastics category included bottle caps, straws, shopping bags, styrofoam, bottles, utensils, and ribbon. 51% of surveyors see bottle caps very frequently, 54% see styrofoam very frequently and 56.7% see plastic bottles very frequently.

How often do you see these metals on shorelines?



The metals category included tin cans, aluminum/beer cans, steel and copper. 32.4% of surveyors see aluminum/beer cans very frequently. 51.3% of surveyors never see copper on shorelines.

How often do you see these fishing related items on shorelines?



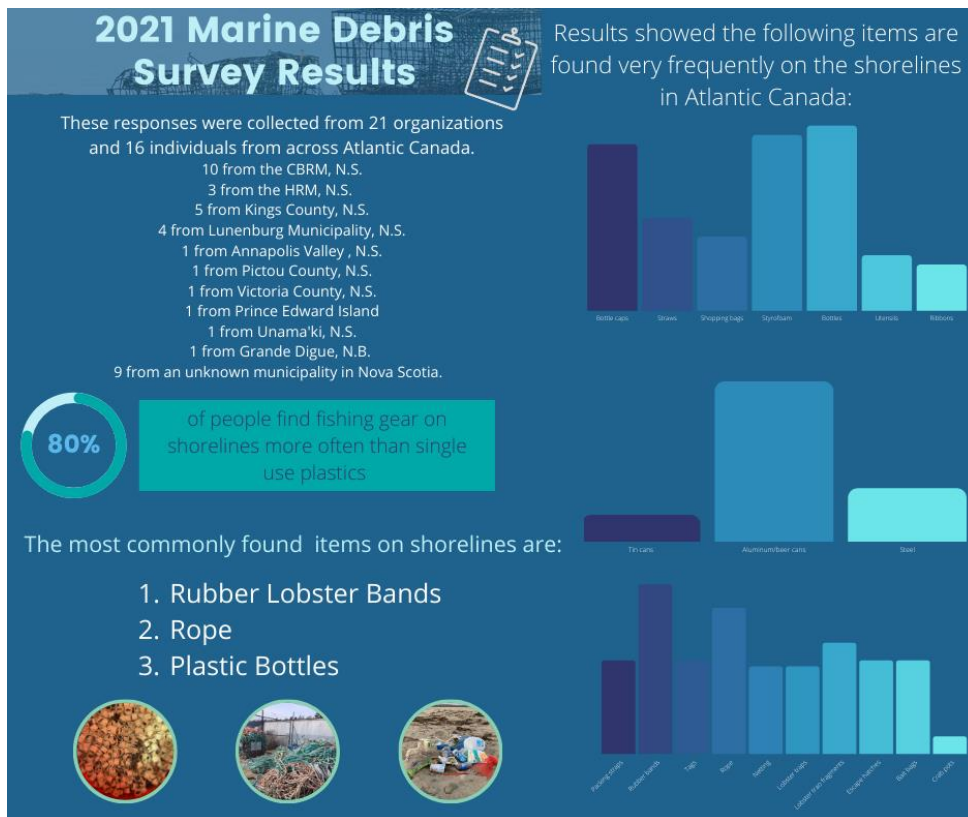
The fishing related items category included packing straps, rubber bands, tags, rope, netting, lobster traps, lobster trap fragments, escape hatches, bait bags and crab pots. 81% of surveyors see rubber bands very frequently. 70% of surveyors see rope very frequently.

Although these four categories included a large variety of common marine debris, the surveyors mentioned garbage they commonly see that has not been previously mentioned. The debris mentioned was fishing line, balloons, popsicle sticks, dog poop bags, cannabis containers, toys, car parts, buoys, boat hardware, fabric, clothing, shoes, gloves, shotgun shells, tampon applicators, tires, diapers, needles, golf balls, construction waste, medical waste, and toilet paper.

When the survey asked, “Which shorelines in your area do you find the most marine debris”, there were a few common answers. An overwhelming number of responses said the Bay of Fundy, specifically Scots Bay. Multiple surveyors also mentioned Glace Bay, Southshore, Donkin and Gabarus.

All the survey responses expressed similar emotions such as disgust, sadness, and anger by seeing marine debris on the shorelines in their communities. Multiple responses also expressed disappointment towards the fishing industry specifically. The surveyors also all have similar opinions on how they would like governments to address these marine debris issues such as through fines, regulations, education, resources, and incentives. They feel that some of these issues can be addressed at the beginning by plastic creation policies, as well as at the end by more strict marine disposal policies. A common solution mentioned was fining fishermen and individuals for lost fishing gear, and littering. “Make fishermen/women more accountable for discarding broken traps”. A large majority of responses believe that the solution is to educate communities on the harm they’re causing as well as providing incentives, funding, research, and encouragement for community cleanups through groups and/or organizations. “Provide more financial support to clean up groups to regularly conduct clean ups.” “By helping the general public/fishers to understand the danger to our sea/land wildlife.”

This survey showed that fishing related debris is the most frequently seen marine debris in Atlantic Canada, the most frequently seen materials by our surveyors were lobster bands and rope. Lobster bands can be harmful to marine life through accidental ingestion. Rope is also very harmful, marine mammals and sea turtles can become entangled in discarded rope, causing them physical pain, starvation and in some cases to drown. This survey also indicated that plenty of Atlantic Canadians are concerned about the marine debris in their communities and want to see governments addressing these issues.



## References

NOAA. What is marine debris? <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/hazards/marinedebris/>