

THE LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE

A Center for Urban Runoff and Watershed Research

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VOLUNTEER LETTER

HOW WE CLEAN THE LAKE: After a rain, we call all the trash over to the shoreline. Our “sonic trash signal” gets it going and all the plastic bags, bottles, cigarette butts and Styrofoam peanuts come skittering across the surface to our nets. Then the stuff that has sunk to the bottom bobs up and drifts on in.

Regardless of the time or date, our fleet of volunteers materializes right after the rain at the central trash location. Within a few hours all the tons of litter, leaves and runoff has been cleaned up and beamed over to the landfill.

And if you believe that, I have a bridge in San Francisco that I would love to sell you.

The Reality: Seven square miles (4,650 acres) of Oakland and Piedmont drain into Lake Merritt. The stuff flows out into the Lake through 62 storm drain openings. Everything on those streets, sidewalks, parking lots and lawns that can fit into a street storm drain opening is washed down without treatment (except for 4 storm drain filters) into the Lake. It's a big watershed with a lot of litterbugs, and that is why we have removed the following amounts of trash for the last seven years:

Monthly Averages in Pounds: 1998 to 2005

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
5,677	6,449	5,377	3,929	2,229	1,353	1,421	1,134	1,694	2,593	6,078	6,318

More Rain = More Trash: Average rainfall (inches) for These Months

3.84	5.75	2.51	1.57	0.67	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.24	1.12	2.39	6.46
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How Long Does It Take? After a rain, there will be trash in the Lake for several days. How long it takes to clean it up depends on how much rain has fallen, how intense the rainfall has been and therefore how much trash has washed in. Once in the Lake, some of it drifts around, following the wind and tidal currents. Some of it hides under docks (and comes out after we have left) and some goes back up into the larger storm drains, only to re-emerge when the tide goes out. All in all, it can take several days before most of it is removed or drifts out into the Bay. But if it keeps on raining, more trash keeps flowing in. Other variables are the number of volunteers and (sometimes) how much duckweed from the golf course is mixed in with the trash.

SUMMARY FOR DECEMBER:

- 4.55 inches of rain
 - 5,320 pounds of trash
 - 122 people
 - 202 bags of trash.
 - Clean ups were conducted on 21 out of 31 days.

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