

568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610 (510) 238-2290
lmi@netwiz.net www.lakemerrittinstitute.org



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St. Paul's Students Clean Up

Every year since 1997, students in the 6th grade at St. Paul's School have marched out of their classroom, donned hip boots and gloves, grabbed nets and trash barrels, and removed trash from the shores of Lake Merritt. In 2008, under the tutelage of teachers Susan Porter and Nicole Start (and under the watchful eye of several volunteer parents), the class removed 134 bags of water-soaked litter. "It was fun" one student was heard to say.

Service learning is not only fun at St. Paul's, it is a requirement. Each class has its own service project. The Lake Merritt clean up project provides not only education about watersheds, but also valuable assistance to Oakland and the thousands of people who enjoy the Lake every day.



Students working together to clean the Lake

Donations Needed

The Lake Merritt Institute is seeking donations, which help us to maintain the quality of the Lake. It's worth a tax write-off!

Not only is trash removed, students who pick up other people's litter soon learn not to litter themselves, a lesson they carry with them for the rest of their lives.

The students' enthusiasm can be boundless, like the time they tied a rope to a sofa chair, hauled it up through teamwork, and put it in the Institute truck. St. Paul's students are also the only group to clean the Glen Echo Creek channel opening adjacent to the Veteran's Memorial Building. At the channel opening, they climb down a ladder to access the trash. Once they even pulled a 20-foot-long piece of pipe from the water.

Needless to say, they find an unusual assortment of objects amongst the trash. Common items include balls, toddlers' toys, and marine critters (snails, slugs, jellyfish, comb jellies and fish, depending on the season). The more impressive finds (for example, dead cell phones) are kept, cleaned up and given out in a class raffle at the end of the school year.

Those passing by are often heard to say thank you, and local television crews have put several students on the evening news, much to their delight. It makes me wish I could have cleaned the Lake when I was in 6th grade.

Stormdrain Inlet Screen Pilot Study

Interview with Will Stockard and Markley Bavinger from the City of Oakland Watershed and Stormwater Management Program outlining the scope of the program.

An inlet screen pilot study is being conducted in the vicinity of Lake Merritt to ascertain the effectiveness and maintenance requirements for screens that prevent trash from entering the stormwater system via storm drain inlets. The pilot study will install a small number of inlet screens in strategic locations to monitor the amount of trash that accumulates and the amount of maintenance that is required, as well as any increased flooding due to blockage of the storm drains.

Staff from the City of Oakland Watershed and Stormwater Management (WSM) in cooperation with the City's Drainage Division are planning and running the pilot study.

The City of Oakland established the Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) in 1996 to improve Oakland's watersheds. In 2009 the Watershed Improvement Program became known as Watershed and Stormwater Management (WSM). WSM runs the Lake Merritt Water Quality Technical Committee and its associated programs.

In 1999, Lake Merritt was listed as an "impaired water body" on the EPA's 303(d) list because of excess trash and low dissolved oxygen. To address the findings, the Lake Merritt Water Quality Technical Committee was established in January 2000 to investigate the excess trash and dissolved oxygen issues through public education, outreach and maintenance.

The goals of WSM are to improve water quality and habitat values throughout Oakland. For Lake Merritt, the City seeks to address pollution from trash and low oxygen levels from decaying organic matter. Through these efforts, the program will reduce the amount of trash that enters the Lake from key locations. WSM is unique to Oakland and has earned recognition through several awards and for its innovative approaches to water quality.

If the screens in the current pilot study prove to be effective, the City may elect to locate additional screens in key trash hotspots. Convenience stores, schools and commercial areas are typical hotspots for litter accumulation.

The impetus for the pilot study comes from existing and new federal and state regulations that require municipalities to prevent trash from polluting regional water resources and threatening aquatic habitat.

The forthcoming Municipal Regional Permit (MRP) requires new levels of water resources protection from impacts from trash. It assumes that our city streets and storm drains are the major source of the trash that enters our waterways and the San Francisco Bay. Other persistent sources of trash have been from freeways, homeless encampments and illegal dumping.

For more on the MRP, see www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay.

Earth Day is a Day for All to Turn Green

By Kaletha Patterson

What meaning has Earth Day taken on since the global population has become more environmentally conscious?

For participants in and around the Oakland area, Earth Day is a reminder to cherish the community, protect natural habitats and unite for a bona fide cause.

According to Cookie M. Robles-Wong at the City of Oakland Public Works Agency's Keep Oakland Clean and Beautiful Division (KOCB), this year's observation of Earth Day in Oakland (on April 18) will mark 15 consecutive years.

People are becoming more aware of recycling, global warming and sustainability. "Because it's coming from all different facets, including the movies, it's always in our faces as a reminder," Ms. Robles-Wong added when asked about her understanding of why the day has become more important for many people.

The number of volunteer participants has grown over the years. In 2008, 4,000 volunteers participated in Earth Day activities, logging 12,000 hours and collecting 1,819 bags of trash. Two thousand green waste bags (equaling 20 tons) were picked up, and the amount of garbage collected weighed three and a half tons.

Due to the high piles of litter that usually accumulated along fenced areas, this year many volunteers will meet at a specified location and/or project site to determine which individuals and/or teams will funnel out to certain points for cleanup.

Robles-Wong noted that participants this year will be cleaning creeks, streets, sidewalks and areas designated as public rights-of-way. One of the newest programs implemented last year was a green waste removal program. Green waste removal typically consisted of removing ivy into bags that had been designated specifically for green waste. To piggyback off of that program, the focus this year will be on separating the debris collected such as recyclables, green waste and trash.



Volunteers holding green bags of trash

After the waste is collected, there is a flurry of activities that occurs. Some people take the trash home in order to recycle it. The rest is collected by Public Works maintenance workers who then take it to a transfer station (Waste Management). It's then sorted, crushed and moved to different locations depending on the type of waste. Areas such as Lake Merritt will receive large debris boxes to gather the trash for the waste disposal.

Aside from collecting trash, volunteers will also plant trees, abate graffiti and remove nonnative species from creeks and debris and illegal dumping.

Last year, Safeway supermarkets gave out thousands of reusable green bags with the word 'organics' printed on the front. This Earth Day, Robles-Wong said they're trying to obtain reusable water bottles to distribute since plastic water bottles are no longer an option.

As a consumer herself, Robles-Wong values being able to reuse items from water bottles to canvas bags. She said she thinks most consumers are well aware of the need to carry reusable bags when shopping, but she's unsure if many merchants are taking note, especially since she still receives plastic bags when grocery shopping.

Earth Day activities are open to people of all ages, and many school-aged children can obtain credit for hours of community service. In fact, most high schools have a

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Tidings

Is Produced by PMC
for the
Lake Merritt Institute
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City of Oakland

To contribute to the Lake
Merritt Institute, contact
us at
(510) 238-2290
or at 568 Bellevue Avenue
Oakland CA 94610



Earth Day volunteers come together to collect mounds of green waste recycling or garden program in which students can get involved.

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.lakemerrittinstitute.org

On the importance of participating in Earth Day, Robles-Wong says it's very humbling and honorable. "Everyone has to make a personal commitment for sustainability. You need to make a commitment to this because it is our future. We each need to take an individual personal responsibility. It renews your commitment to better our community." For featured Earth Day locations that include more than 100 sites, please visit the Web site: www.oaklandearthday.com

The Lake Merritt Institute
568 Bellevue Avenue
Oakland, CA 94610



Volunteer Name
Street Address
City, ST ZIP Code