

## **Brits' rubbish habits are going down the pan as more of us use the toilet as a watery dustbin**

### **Marine Conservation Society condemns rise in bathroom rubbish found on UK beaches and urges the public to 'bag it and bin it – don't flush it'**

The British public are putting far more down their toilets than they should be and the result is beaches awash with items like cotton buds, condoms, sanitary towels and tampon applicators, according to the latest findings from the Marine Conservation Society's (MCS) Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010 report.

Despite litter levels on our beaches falling in 2009 from an all time high in 2008, last year average litter levels increased by 6%, with a rise of over 40% in sewage related debris – that's the stuff we shouldn't put down our toilets but in the bathroom waste bin instead.

MCS Beachwatch Officer, Lauren Davis, says the figures reveal a shocking picture of what people do in the privacy of their own bathroom: "Increasingly, people seem to be putting things down their loos that belong in the bin. Cotton buds, condoms, tampons, tampon applicators and sanitary towels are being flushed away with an 'out of sight, out of mind' perception. But sewerage networks and waste water treatment works are not specifically designed to remove these sort of items and, unfortunately, more and more are ending up in our rivers and on our beaches."

The MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010 results were collected by almost 5,000 volunteers who cleaned 376 beaches, covering a total of 167 kilometres over the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010. 330,107 items of litter were collected filling over 3,000 bags. For every kilometre surveyed almost 2,000 pieces of litter were found.

Only two regions in the UK saw a decrease in the amount of bathroom waste found on beaches – Northern Ireland and the North West, whilst the largest increase was in the North East, where it rose by 230% followed by Wales with a 110% increase.

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Lauren Davis says the rise in sewage related debris, like cotton buds and condoms, highlights a gap in the knowledge of the UK public: “When people drop a cotton bud down the loo after cleaning their ears, applying make up or drying baby’s creases, they have no idea that the same cotton bud could end up on their favourite beach, washed up just where they want to put their towel down. There is a serious misconception that once it’s flushed away, it’s gone. But it just isn’t. We want people to follow our simple message – bag it, bin it – but don’t flush it. Stop using your loo as a wet bin.”

This message also strikes a chord with the UK’s water companies. Edmund Bramley Yorkshire Water’s Environmental Regulation Manager, says “We support MCS’s call for people to dispose of bathroom waste responsibly, by placing it in the bin, rather than flushing it down the toilet. By flushing things like baby wipes, cotton buds or nappies down toilets people can end up causing damage both to their homes and the environment. MCS’s message complements our own ‘Are You Doing The Dirty?’ campaign, and we hope that by linking up with them we can spread our joint message as wide as possible.”

The charity wants to turn the tide on rubbish, making our seas and beaches cleaner and safer for people and wildlife. MCS is campaigning for Defra to act now to stop the growing marine litter problem by developing a coherent, coordinated plan to crack down on the amount of litter that is washing up or being dropped on our beaches.

Visit [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org) for more information.

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**Press contacts:**

**MCS Beachwatch Officer: Lauren Davis 01989 561 597**

**MCS Pollution Programme Manager: Robert Keirle 01989 561 589**

**MCS Litter Campaigns Officer: Emma Snowden 01989 561590**

**MCS Media and Editorial Officer: Clare Fischer 01989 561 658**

**MCS Communications Manager: Richard Harrington 01989 561585**

## **Broadcasters – MCS has an ISDN facility**

### **Editors Notes**

**You can download the MCS Beachwatch Report 2010 full and summary reports here:**

[http://www.mcsuk.org/what we do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/Reports+and+downloads/Press+downloads](http://www.mcsuk.org/what_we_do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/Reports+and+downloads/Press+downloads)

**You can download press images here:**

[http://www.mcsuk.org/what we do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/Beachwatch/Beachwatch+-+press+photos](http://www.mcsuk.org/what_we_do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/Beachwatch/Beachwatch+-+press+photos)

**The Marine Conservation Society (MCS)** is the UK charity dedicated to the protection of our seas, shores and wildlife. MCS campaigns for clean seas and beaches, sustainable fisheries, and protection of marine life. Through education, community involvement and collaboration, MCS raises awareness of the many threats that face our seas and promotes individual, industry and government action to protect the marine environment.

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MCS provides information and guidance on many aspects of marine conservation and produces the annual Good Beach Guide ([www.goodbeachguide.co.uk](http://www.goodbeachguide.co.uk)), the Good Fish Guide and [www.fishonline.org](http://www.fishonline.org) on sustainable seafood, as well as promoting public participation in volunteer projects such as MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend and Basking Shark Watch. [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org)

**MCS Beachwatch** is an annual UK-wide beach litter survey and clean up, organised by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) since 1993. Beachwatch is the flagship event of the Adopt-a-Beach project, which encourages local volunteers to survey marine litter every 3 months. Volunteers remove all the litter from a measured area of their local beach, recording every item that they find. The data gathered from Beachwatch every September is published by MCS in the Beachwatch Report. This information is used at national and international levels to raise awareness of the impacts of marine litter, to promote measures to reduce litter at source and to campaign for marine litter legislation. The 18<sup>th</sup> Beachwatch litter survey and beach clean took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010. Beachwatch 2011 will take place on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September, for further information see [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org).

Cross-channel ferry company **SeaFrance** are the lead sponsors of MCS Beachwatch. In addition to direct financial support of this project, SeaFrance and its staff regularly show their commitment to a healthy future for our seas, shores and wildlife by cleaning their local beach, Kingsdown in Kent. SeaFrance's support has helped MCS mobilise thousands of volunteers to remove and survey litter on hundreds of beaches throughout the UK. For additional comment SeaFrance's Senior Communications Executive, Ellie Philpott, can be reached on 0871 282 8507.

#### **Further results from MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010:**

##### **UK Wide Overview**

During MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010 the highest overall litter density recorded was in Wales with 3,372 items/km, representing a 9% increase compared to Beachwatch Big Weekend 2009 (3,084 items/km).

Scotland had the second highest litter levels, an increase of 25% from 2009 (1,907 items/km in 2009 compared to 2,382 items/kilometre in 2010). England had the third highest litter levels (1,805 items/km) representing a 1.5% increase compared to figures relating to Beachwatch Big Weekend 2009 (1,778 items/km).

Northern Ireland had the fourth highest average litter density level (1,122 items/km in 2010) representing a 37% reduction on the figure for 2009 (1,775 items/km). In 2009, there was an increase of 89% from 2008.

The Channel Islands, had the lowest litter density (1,015 items/km in 2010) representing a 7% increase compared to litter density in 2009 (948 items/km).

Within England, the greatest density of litter was recorded- as in previous years - in the South West, where 3,144 items/km were recorded, followed by the South East (1,564/km), North East (1,336/km) and North West (1,324/km) respectively.

When compared to MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2009, average litter densities increased in all countries and regions with the exception of the North West, South West and Northern Ireland.

#### Summary of MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010

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<b>Beachwatch 2010 Summary</b>	
Volunteers	4,927
Number of beaches surveyed	376
Total length surveyed (km)	167.6
Number of bags	3,058
% Public	37.4
% Fishing	15.3
% Sewage-related debris (SRD)*	7.3
% Shipping	1.8
% Fly tipped	1.0
% Medical	0.3
% Non-sourced	37.1
Total number of items	330,107
Total volunteer hours	10,579
Mean items/km	<b>1,969.7</b>

\*If data from three beaches where over 9,433 cotton bud sticks were recorded are removed, the percentage for SRD is 2.9%.

The 4 main sources of litter found are as follows: -

- Public – Litter dropped at the beach or inland and carried to the sea by wind and drains, includes crisp packets, cigarette stubs and sweet wrappers.
- Fishing – Items from commercial or recreational fishing activities, includes ropes, nets, line and hooks.
- Shipping – Litter dropped from ships, includes lost cargo, pallets and strapping bands.
- Sewage-related debris – Sanitary items that have come through the sewerage system or overflow pipes.

The 20 most common litter items collected in Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010.

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Position in 2009	Position in 2010	Litter Item	% of Total Litter	Items/km
1	1	Plastic pieces <2.5cm	11.7	231.3
2	2	Plastic pieces >2.5cm	10.4	204.0
4	3	Plastic rope/cord/string	7.1	140.2
5	4	Plastic caps/lids	6.4	126.5
3	5	Crisp/sweet/lolly wrappers	6.0	119.0
6	6	Polystyrene pieces	5.8	114.6
9	7	Cotton bud sticks	4.8	95.1
8	8	Fishing net and net pieces <50cm	4.4	87.1
7	9	Plastic drinks bottles	4.1	80.6
11	10	Glass pieces	3.3	64.4
<b>TOP 10 ITEMS</b>			<b>64.1</b>	<b>1262.8</b>
13	11	Fishing line (from anglers)	2.3	45.2
12	12	Metal drink cans	2.3	45.2
14	13	Plastic bags (including supermarket)	2.2	43.4
15	14	Plastic cutlery/trays/straws/cups	2.2	42.7
10	15	Cigarette stubs	1.5	29.2
17	16	Cloth pieces	1.4	27.8
16	17	Polystyrene foam/sponge/insulation	1.3	26.3
19	18	Wood pieces	1.2	23.2
32	19	Towels/panty liners/backing strips	1.1	22.5
18	20	Plastic food containers	1.1	21.9
<b>TOP 20 ITEMS</b>			<b>80.7</b>	<b>1590.2</b>

Country and regional variations in beach litter.

Region	No. of beaches surveyed	Total no. of volunteers	Total litter items	Total length surveyed (km)	Items/km in 2010	Items/km in 2009	Items/km in 2008	Items/km in 2007	Items/km in 2006
<b>Country</b>									
Channel Islands	32	295	14,668	14.4	<b>1015.2</b>	948.8	1446.0	1414.5	1646.2
Northern Ireland	8	63	4,983	4.4	<b>1122.3</b>	1775.1	940.2	1057.1	624.6
Scotland	57	767	53,162	22.3	<b>2382.2</b>	1907.4	2581.4	2727.8	2091.7
Wales	64	755	62,694	18.6	<b>3372.8</b>	3084.2	2549.9	2654.8	2524.8
England (total)	215	3047	194,600	107.8	<b>1805.2</b>	1778.6	2460.8	2094.3	2084.3
<b>England Regions</b>									
NE England	41	460	31,693	23.7	<b>1336.0</b>	1165.9	1459.8	1322.5	1620.6
NW England	11	93	7,046	5.3	<b>1324.4</b>	2256.3	1658.8	1983.2	1926.5
SE England	101	1,638	90,906	58.1	<b>1564.7</b>	1445.8	1941.3	1841.7	1604.4
SW England	62	856	64,955	20.7	<b>3144.2</b>	3269.2	4783.6	3230.0	3185.7
<b>UK Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>4927</b>	<b>330,107</b>	<b>167.6</b>	<b>1969.7</b>	1849.2	2195.1	2053.7	1988.7

**Channel Islands**

A total of 14,668 litter items were collected on 32 beaches (consisting of 23 beaches on Guernsey,

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five on Herm Island, one on Alderney and three on Jersey) over a total length of 14.4km. An average of 1,015 litter items/kilometre were recorded, lower than the 2010 UK average of 1,969 items/kilometre (figure 19) but higher than results in 2009 (949 items/kilometre) representing a 7% increase in litter levels.

#### **Northern Ireland**

A total of 4,983 items of litter were collected on eight beaches over a total length of 4.4km. On average 1,122 items/km were recorded, less than the UK average (1,969 items/km) and lower than results in 2009 (1,775 items/km) representing a 37% decrease in litter density this year.

#### **Scotland**

57 beaches took part in MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010 in Scotland. A total of 53,162 litter items were collected over a total length of 22.3km. On average, 2,382 items/km were recorded, higher than the UK average of 1,969 items/km, representing an increase of 25% from 2009. The overall litter density figure in Scotland falls to 2,191 items/km when data from East Bay, Helensburgh and Leven area 2 beaches are removed from analysis.

#### **Wales**

A total of 62,694 litter items were collected from a total of 64 surveyed beaches in Wales. An average of 3,372 litter items/km were recorded (the highest average litter density level ever recorded, even after the highest previous record of 2009) compared to 3,084 in 2009 (figure 22), representing a 9% increase.

#### **England**

A total of 194,600 litter items were collected on 215 beaches over a total length of 107.8km. The density of litter in England was 1,805 items/km, lower than the UK average of 1,969 items/km, representing a 1.5% increase when compared to 2009 figures (1778 items/km).

#### **North East**

A total of 31,693 items of litter were collected from 41 beaches over a total length of 23.7km. On average 1,336 items of litter/km were found, lower than the UK average (1,969 items/km) representing an increase of 14% compared to 2009 figures (1,165 items/km).

#### **North West**

A total of 7,046 items of litter were collected from 11 beaches over a total length of 5.3km. On average 1,324 items/km were found, the lowest litter levels have been since 2003 and lower than the UK average (1,969 items/km). There is a 41% decrease compared to 2009 figures (2,256 items/km).

#### **South East**

A total of 90,906 items of litter were collected from 101 beaches over a total length of 58.1km. On average 1,564 litter items/km were found, lower than the UK average (1,969/km), and 8% more than in 2009 (1,445 items/km).

#### **South West**

A total of 64,955 litter items were collected from 62 beaches over a total length of 20.6km. On average 3,144 items/km were recorded, considerably higher than the UK average (1,969 items/km), representing a 3% decrease compared to 2009 average figures (3,269 items/km).

### **Country and regional sources of litter recorded during MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010**

UK Region	Public	Fishing	SRD	Shipping	Fly tipped	Medical	Non-sourced
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Country	%	Items/ km	%	Items/km	%	Items/km	%	Items/km	%	Items/km	%	Items/km	%	Items/ km
Channel Islands	32.1	325.7	23.0	233.0	1.3	12.9	2.1	21.4	0.6	6.0	0.1	1.2	40.9	414.9
Northern Ireland	42.6	478.4	11.3	127.0	11.8	132.4	1.7	19.1	1.8	20.0	0.1	1.6	30.6	343.7
Scotland	37.5	894.5	8.9	212.3	20.5	487.8	1.7	40.9	1.6	38.9	0.2	3.9	29.6	704.0
Wales	35.2	1,188.6	19.1	644.6	6.6	223.5	1.4	48.8	0.5	17.6	0.2	5.8	36.9	1,243.9
England (total)	38.4	692.6	15.3	275.7	4.2	75.5	1.9	34.0	1.0	17.5	0.2	3.7	39.1	706.1
<b>England Region</b>														
NE England	42.5	567.2	9.5	126.8	8.1	108.6	1.5	20.5	0.8	10.9	0.3	3.6	37.3	498.4
NW England	48.1	637.2	9.8	130.1	3.4	45.7	3.2	42.7	1.4	19.0	8.5	112.8	25.4	337.0
SE England	37.4	584.7	15.7	246.2	3.4	53.3	2.2	33.8	1.2	19.1	0.2	2.8	39.9	624.8
SW England	36.7	1,154.2	18.0	567.5	3.4	107.6	1.5	47.7	0.6	20.3	0.2	6.6	39.4	1,240.3
<b>UK Total</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>737.2</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>300.6</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>142.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>35.1</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>730.8</b>

### Channel Islands

The highest litter source for the Channel Islands was public litter with a density of 325.7 items/km (32.1% of all litter found), but the lowest throughout the UK. Fishing litter (233 items/km) was the second highest followed by shipping at 21.4 items/km and SRD at 12.9 items/km respectively, representing 1.3% of all litter recorded, way under the UK average of 7.3% and the lowest of all parts of the UK.

### Northern Ireland

Litter from the public was the main source recorded at 478.4 items/km representing 42.6% of all litter. SRD was the second highest at 132.4 items/km, followed by fishing (127.0 items/km) and shipping (19.1 items/km) respectively. However, as only eight beaches were surveyed during MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010 due to the small sample size, we are not able to state with any confidence that this is a representative picture of litter on Northern Ireland beaches.

### Scotland

Scotland had the highest litter densities of SRD (487.8 items/km) and fly tipped (38.9 items/km). The highest source recorded was litter coming from the public (894.5 items/km), followed by SRD (487.8 items/km, representing 20.5% of total litter, almost three times higher than the 7.3% UK average), fishing (212.3 items/km) and shipping (40.9 items/km). If the results of East Bay Helensburgh and Leven area 2 beaches (which were particularly badly affected by SRD litter) are removed, SRD makes up 12% of all litter – still nearly double the UK average.

### Wales

Wales had the highest litter densities of four out of the six source categories: public (1,188 items/km), fishing (644.6 items/km), shipping (48.8 items/km) and medical (5.8 items/km). The main source recorded was public litter followed by fishing (644.6 items/km), SRD (223.5 items/km) and shipping (48.8 items/km).

### England

England didn't show highest or lowest levels for any of the source categories, although public litter made up the majority of litter recorded. Public litter was again the main source recorded on beaches in England (692.6 items/km), followed by fishing (275.7 items/km), SRD (75.5 items/km) and shipping (34.0 items/km) respectively.

### North East

The North East had the lowest litter density levels for public litter (567.2 items/km), fishing (126.8 items/km), shipping (20.5 items/km) and fly tipped (10.9 items/km). Public litter was the largest source of litter in the North East, followed by fishing, SRD and shipping respectively. The North East had the highest SRD levels of all four regions within England.

### North West

The North West had the lowest litter levels of SRD of all four regions (45.7 items/km) and the highest levels of medical waste (112.8 items/km). The largest source recorded was public litter (637.2

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items/km) followed by fishing (130.1 items/km), medical and SRD respectively. However, as only eleven beaches were surveyed during MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2010 due to the small sample size, we are not able to state with any confidence that this is a representative picture of litter on North West beaches.

### **South East**

The South East showed the lowest density levels in medical waste (2.8 items/km). The main source recorded was public litter at 584.7 items/km, whilst the second highest source was fishing (246.2 items/km), followed by SRD (53.3 items/km) and shipping (33.8 items/km).

### **South West**

This region had the highest litter densities in public (1,154.2 items/km), fishing (567.5 items/km), shipping (47.7 items/km) and fly tipped (20.3 items/km) of all four regions. The main source recorded was public, followed by fishing, SRD (107.6 items/km) and shipping respectively.