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Piping down on pollution

Monofilament containers going up at fishing
spots

By Sean Horgan Staff Writer Jun 26, 2018



SEAN HORGAN/Staff photo/Jack McMahon, left, of Hamilton and Ryan Keeth, right, of Belmont build fishing line collection containers as Seaside Sustainability marine science coordinator Josh Sheridan of Essex looks on. The containers will be installed in high-volume boating and fishing areas on Cape Ann.

The clock was ticking on the young crew from Seaside Sustainability on Tuesday, as they rushed to complete about 20 new fishing line collection containers that will be donated to Gloucester and other Cape Ann

communities to install at docks and other high-volume boating and fishing areas.

The problem was that it was Tuesday and the St. Peter's Fiesta was set to begin a mere 24 hours later. And Fiesta, as anyone knows who's experienced it, tends to monopolize the time and focus of the Gloucester Harbormaster corps as the city's water-borne population swells to huge numbers of revelers.

"We're rushing as fast as we can," Kate Christiansen, the project manager for Essex-based Seaside Sustainability's "Reel In and Recycle" program, said in a phone interview Tuesday afternoon. "We're in the process of building them right now and trying to get as much done as we can before Fiesta."

Literally as Christiansen spoke, Josh Sheridan, Essex Sustainability's marine science coordinator, led a team of three interns in an impromptu assembly line to transform 6-inch PVC piping — donated by the Building Center on the Gloucester waterfront — into monofilament collection containers.

Working in a backyard on Marchant Street in Gloucester, Ryan Keeth of Belmont, Jack McMahon of Hamilton and Sophia Guerriero of Essex toiled in the bright sunshine to complete the marked recovery units designed to mitigate the environmental pollution and navigational hazard of abandoned monofilament fishing line in oceans and other marine venues.

"When fishermen break a line or when they restring a line, the monofilament fishing line can drop in the water and become marine debris," Christiansen said. "It can cause entanglements, both of marine life and boat gear, such as propeller shafts. And since the monofilament is invisible under water, marine animals also ingest it."

According to the Project Aware organization, which runs a "Dive Against Debris" program that has removed more than a million pieces of trash items from the ocean, the most prevalent item is plastic fishing line.

The collection devices, which resemble a four-foot periscope, with an elbow at the open top and a screw plate at the bottom, will be maintained by the individual harbormasters in the communities in which they're installed.

The harbormasters will be responsible for emptying the containers and recycling the monofilament fishing line. The state Division of Marine Fisheries has a monofilament recycling unit at its Annisquam River Station facility on Emerson Avenue.

Gloucester is set to receive five of the units, according to Harbormaster T.J. Ciarametaro, with two designated for the Dun Fudgin public boat ramp behind Gloucester High School and the others to be spread among high-volume boating and fishing area around the city.

"It's an excellent idea and we're excited to be part of it and anything else that will help keep trash out of the water," Ciarametaro said Tuesday afternoon.

Essex police Chief Peter J. Silva, who also serves as the town's harbormaster, said he has been contacted by Christiansen and is intrigued by the idea because of the obvious environmental and safety elements it addresses.

"We're in favor of anything that helps us clean up the water, especially the poly-products like the monofilament fishing line, that people are so worried about," Silva said. "It sounds like a very worthy project."

Two years ago, the state Division of Marine Fisheries developed a similar program called the Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program that provided communities with the receptacles. The town of Manchester received four of the collection units, Christiansen said.

Manchester Harbormaster Bion Pike could not be immediately reached Tuesday for comment.