



## **Volunteers Clean-Up Saxman's Coastline**

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Wednesday

Saxman, Alaska - Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said "A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." A team of eight volunteers put that message into practice in Saxman on July 17th, 2010, removing 2,400 pounds of hazardous marine debris from tidelands belonging to the City of Saxman.



Volunteers pose next to 2,400 of marine debris collected from Saxman's waterfront property. Pictured are (left to right) Ron Burton, Jason Custer, Tony Knuteson, Donald Jones, Margaret Custer, and Louis Hock. Robert Fultz and Art Hebert also volunteered, but are not included in the photograph.  
Photograph courtesy City of Saxman

Debris removed included discarded marine and car batteries, gigantic tangles of fishing line and netting, bottles of discarded motor oil, pieces of wrecked marine vessels, electrical wires, bags of household trash, jagged, rusty metal objects, and more.

The strangest piece of trash collected was a small, plastic rotisserie chicken toy.

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation employee Bob Fultz, who participated in the clean-up, reflected: "It was fun to be a part of the first wave of local volunteers that took part in cleaning debris from the beach in front of city hall in Saxman this past Saturday. I hope this is the beginning of a

regular service locals and others in the area can embrace to make a difference. Saxman is an incredibly beautiful town and to see it "trash free" is a site to behold. Kudos to Jason Custer who organized this event and hopefully many more."

The clean-up was organized with the support of grant funding from the Alaska Center for Coastal Studies and National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) community-based marine debris clean-up and prevention program.

During the clean-up, Saxman elders and community members stopped by to check on progress, and share their ideas for better use of Saxman's beaches. "Everyone who spoke to me said that they wanted to see Saxman's tidelands become a clean, safe place for subsistence and recreation," said Jason Custer, the City of Saxman's grant coordinator. "Many of the people I spoke to told me they wished there was a harbor or boat launch in the area, so that Saxman's people could have increased marine access and safe moorage."



A massive ball of discarded line and netting cut from vegetation

along Saxman's waterfront.  
Photo by Margaret Custer.

Resident Tony Knutson, who owns property adjacent to the City's tidelands, explained: "Saxman's beaches weren't always like this. It's only been in the last five years that people started dumping their junk here."

The transition from private dumpsite to healthy, accessible public beach won't be an easy one. Said Custer: "This is just the beginning of a larger effort to make Saxman's beaches a healthy, safe place that the entire community can enjoy. We'll be putting forth more effort into cleaning-up the area through the coming weeks."

Illegal dumping and marine debris have a negative impact upon the health of the community and environment. Discarded chemicals, automotive fluids, and rusted metal pose safety risks to community members -- especially children. Coastal dumpsites can result in death or injury to wildlife, and can make subsistence foods unsafe for human consumption. Dumpsites have a negative impact upon property value, and can attract other illegal activities. "Dumpsites send a message that anything goes, and that no one cares," said Custer. "That is not true in Saxman."

The City of Saxman urges residents to report illegal dumping to the Alaska State Troopers, and/or Saxman City Hall. Community members are encouraged by the City of Saxman to write down license plate numbers, and take cell phone pictures of illegal dumpers.

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