

EPA awards funding to water pollution prevention projects

The agency awarded \$365,000 to various projects in New York and New Jersey.

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The **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) has awarded \$365,000 for projects that will prevent plastic trash from polluting water bodies in New Jersey and New York. The funding was awarded to seven organizations through a competitive grant process run by **New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission** (NEIWPC), and that is aimed at stimulating comprehensive solutions to the burgeoning problem of plastics in lakes, rivers, harbors and oceans.

"Our oceans and lakes and rivers are being choked with plastic debris," says EPA Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck. "Estimates are that by 2025 there will be 1 ton of plastic for every 3 tons of fish in the world's oceans. These projects offer real solutions that focus on reducing plastic waste at the source."

It is estimated that over 8 million metric tons of plastic pollution enter the world's oceans annually. By 2025, this amount is expected to more than double. A recent study by New York/New Jersey Baykeeper showed that at least 165 million plastic particles are floating in the New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary at any given time.

This grant program is focused on projects that will support the EPA's Trash Free Waters initiative's goal of reducing the volume of plastic trash entering fresh and marine water environments, approaching zero-loading of trash into U.S. waters within 10 years.

The recipients of the New York/New Jersey Aquatic Trash Prevention 2016 Grant Program are:

NYC Department of Environmental Protection—\$32,500

The NYC Department of Environmental Protection will receive \$32,500 to help fund a project that will encourage participating supermarkets and grocery stores to reduce their use of single-use bags. "The Trash Free NYC Waters: Bag Challenge" will use a combination of public outreach, market-based research and creative messaging to educate the supermarket industry and the communities they serve on how their operations and decisions directly impact surrounding waterbodies. The challenge ultimately aims to reduce the pollution of waterbodies by creating a shift in how supermarkets operate and interact with customers, ensuring the long-term preservation of New York City waterbodies.

North Hudson Sewerage Authority—\$48,125

The North Hudson Sewerage Authority will use a \$48,125 grant to fund its "Preventing Aquatic Trash" program. The Preventing Aquatic Trash program will reduce the volume of plastic trash entering the Hudson River from New Jersey by retrofitting 250 faceplate covers on catch basins in high volume traffic areas in Union City and West New York, New Jersey to capture trash before it enters waterways. The authority's current maintenance staff will install and maintain the faceplate grate covers. This strategy has been successfully implemented by the North Hudson Sewerage Authority in Hoboken, New Jersey. North Hudson Sewerage Authority will measure the effectiveness of this project to reduce plastic trash entering the Hudson by measuring increase of trash captured by maintenance staff when they clean the catch basins.

The Product Stewardship Institute, Inc.—\$56,425

The Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) will use a \$56,425 grant to reduce the amount of single-use plastics—including bags, bottles, cups and lids, straws and plates—that are used by guests and customers of waterfront commercial properties along Long Island’s North Fork. The institute will work with local businesses, including waterfront hotels, restaurants and campgrounds, to measure each business’ “plastic footprint” to determine the amount and types of single-use plastic products they use, and identify reusable, compostable or recyclable alternatives. PSI will also develop source reduction plans for each business and create procurement policies that will minimize or eliminate the number of disposable plastics each business uses. Finally, the Public Stewardship Institute will develop model municipal and tourism board policies that encourage waterfront businesses to reduce disposable plastic products use, and will create a marine debris prevention toolkit for commercial properties that will provide step-by-step guidance for coastal communities throughout the nation.

Hudson River Foundation/NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program—\$67,693

The Hudson River Foundation, the NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program and Montclair State University’s Passaic River Institute will use a \$67,693 grant to collect data on how litter is generated and dispersed in New Jersey, including “floatables” entering local waterways, in order to target reduction strategies. This project’s objectives will culminate in an outreach campaign to communities and stakeholders in the NY-NJ Harbor Estuary. Ultimately, this project will provide data on the most prominent sources and types of litter so that pollution prevention measures can be targeted by material, by watershed and by key stakeholders.

Cafeteria Culture—\$60,111

Cafeteria Culture, a project of the Fund for the City of New York, will use a \$60,111 grant to help fund its Community Arts and Media for Trash Free Waters project. Community Arts and Media for Trash Free Waters is a school-community partnership and demonstration project in three low-income, urban communities of color with the goal of reducing plastic street litter and increasing recycling via youth-led, community-designed education and engagement campaigns that focus on the negative environmental and health impacts of land-based plastic marine pollution. Students at each participating school take on leadership roles in their own community and work with intergenerational teams to conduct litter characterization studies and clean-ups, to pilot and promote rewards systems with local businesses and to design creative messaging campaigns via social media, short videos and other methods. Videos created through CAM 4 TFW are promoted citywide and nationally via CafCu’s Youtube channel, inspiring other low-income, public housing and immigrant communities to replicate similar initiatives.

Bronx River Alliance—\$52,866

The Bronx River Alliance’s “Project WASTE” (Waterway and Street Trash Elimination) will use a \$52,886 grant to reduce the amount of plastic trash entering the Bronx River from upstream sources. Working with NYC Parks’ Natural Resource Group and the New York Botanical Gardens, the Bronx River Alliance will conduct floatable trash assessments at trash collection booms and at accumulation hot spots in upstream, midstream and downstream locations, and will analyze the data to determine the sources of the trash. Staff will conduct outreach to businesses identified as sources to explore options for reducing disposable trash generation, and to provide information to local officials to support infrastructure solutions (such as trash bins and fencing). Alliance staff will also work with two Bronx and two Westchester high schools to educate students about the impact of loose trash on the environment, and to support students to generate and carry out their own public awareness projects. Continued trash boom and hot spot assessments will help evaluate the effectiveness of project activities.

Clean Water Fund—\$47,250

The Clean Water Fund will receive \$47,250 to fund its “ReThink Disposable in Jersey” program. The Clean Water Fund’s ReThink Disposable is a voluntary program that helps the food industry reduce solid waste at the source by driving down the use of take-out packaging. This project will provide marine debris education to restaurants, food trucks and other food establishments along the boardwalk

and in the downtown areas of Asbury Park, New Jersey. The Clean Water Fund will conduct interactive trainings for up to 10 interested businesses and other stakeholders and will provide technical assistance at one to four food establishments or other venues in the city. The Clean Water Fund will also increase the visibility of the project through social media, the organization's mailing list and through tabling events along the Asbury Park boardwalk and other locations.