

LA Students Put Plastic Pollution Under the Microscope in Chile

By Mark Friedman, *Contributing Writer*

A group of high school students and teachers from Los Angeles recently returned from Chile's prestigious Coastal Laboratory of Aquatic Resources in Calfuco, just outside of Valdivia. Students participated in a workshop structured to develop their awareness and expertise relating to the protection and care of the oceans.

The PAR Explora of CONICYT Los Ríos joined this final initiative aimed at teachers to provide methodological tools to stimulate students in scientific research. The initiative also aimed to motivate students to care for the environment, especially that of the oceans and the entire ecosystem that it comprises.

The educational activities began May 7. Elementary and middle school students of various educational establishments in the Valdivia region, were taught about microplastic pollution and research. The aim was to galvanize new recycling programs and greater consciousness of the plastic impact on marine organisms and humans through ingestion of marine shellfish and fish.

Emphasis in these workshops was to complement the learning objectives of subjects such as natural sciences, history, geography, mathematics, language and communication, and visual arts. That points to the critical and reflective thinking of scientific research. Teachers and students physically examined local beach sand with plastic particles and dissected boluses (stomach contents) of albatross chicks that died from plastic consumption.

Carolina Rodríguez, environmental education educator in schools from North Patagonia to Southern South, pointed out how interesting it is to be able to apply practical activities with

students to guide them to discover the effects of human beings on the oceans.

"It is very important to teach school children how to identify the different types of plastics and fight them," Rodriguez said. "In addition to learning the methodologies, it is essential to see



Middle school students from Valdivia, Chile dissect boluses for plastic pollution. Photo by Mark Friedman.

how to prevent the entry of this material into the ecosystem. It is important to see the ecology in another way, not only in a way that the human being uses it and how it affects us, but also to value it for itself and see that the other organisms that live on the planet have the right to live in a healthy environment free of our trash."

All this was possible thanks to a scholarship given by the U.S. Embassy to the Faculty of Sciences of the Austral University of Chile. Coordinating this effort in Chile were Carla Christie and Paula Marin. Support also came from the United States with a grant from Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn and materials donated for the workshops by Algalita, Ocean Conservancy, 5Gyres, LA Maritime Institute, HHMI Medical Institute Winged Ambassadors and City2Sea.

RANDOM LENGTHS NEWS

"A newspaper is not just for reporting the news as it is, but to make people mad enough to do something about it."

—Mark Twain

Vol. XXXIX : No. 11

Published every two weeks for the Harbor Area communities of San Pedro, RPY, Lomita, Harbor City, Wilmington, Carson and Long Beach. Distributed at over 350 locations throughout the Harbor Area.

Publisher/Executive Editor
James Preston Allen
james@randomlengthsnews.com

Assoc. Publisher/Production Coordinator
Suzanne Matsumiya

Managing Editor
Terelle Jerrick
editor@randomlengthsnews.com

Senior Editor
Paul Rosenberg

Columnists/Reporters
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Reporter
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Send Calendar Items to:
14days@randomlengthsnews.com

Photographers
Jessie Dreznik, Terelle Jerrick,
Diana Lejins, Raphael Richardson

Contributors
Lou Caravella, Sara Corcoran,
Mark Friedman, Gregory Moore

Cartoonists
Ann Cleaves, Andy Singer,
Jan Sorensen, Matt Wuerker

Design/Production
Suzanne Matsumiya,
Brenda Lopez

Advertising Representative
Justin Shahian
Sales1@randomlengthsnews.com

Display Advertising (310) 519-1442
Classifieds (310) 519-1016
Fax: (310) 832-1000
www.randomlengthsnews.com

Random Lengths News editorial office is located at
1300 S. Pacific Ave., San Pedro, CA 90731.
Address correspondence regarding news items and tips to Random Lengths News, P.O. Box 731, San Pedro, CA 90730-0731, or email: editor@randomlengthsnews.com.
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