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October 21, 2016

Newsroom

The Legal Impact of Marine Debris

Senator Whitehouse, other national and local experts confront a growing threat to New England's tourism, ecological health and fisheries industry



Marine debris will be the focus of the Tenth Marine Law Symposium, to be held at RWU Law on Friday, November 4, with a featured keynote by Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse.

For a registration fee of just \$50, this comprehensive conference is approved for six (6) Rhode Island MCLE credits (with zero legal ethics credits). Register [here](#).

"We are bringing together national and local environmental leaders working on innovative ways to address marine debris," said **Julia Wyman, director of RWU Law's Marine Affairs Institute and of the Rhode Island Sea Grant Legal Program**. "We will spend the day learning about how their approaches can help inform sound law and policy reform in New England.

Senator Whitehouse, co-chair of the bipartisan Senate Oceans Caucus, and great ocean champion, will give a keynote in the morning. **Dr. Sandra Whitehouse**, Senior Policy Advisor for Ocean Conservancy, will also provide a keynote on the science behind marine debris and its effects on the environment. Throughout the rest of the day, we will hear from a variety of voices—**government leaders, non-profits, recreational users, educators**, on how they have effectively combatted marine debris in their work. We will wrap the day up with a robust discussion on potential opportunities to reform law and policy to better address the complex problems of marine debris."

"The problem of marine debris is not just an esoteric legal or policy issue – it's a tangible crisis that most of us who love and work or play on and off the New England coastline have experienced in one form or

another,” said **RWU Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky**. “I’m excited about the strong program our Marine Affairs Institute team has put together, and I look forward to hearing some of the country’s top experts help us understand what lawyers, scientists and policymakers can do to confront the problem.”

Marine debris poses a serious threat to New England’s coastline. Every year, tons of derelict fishing gear, plastic bottles, plastic bags, cigarettes, abandoned vessels, and other debris wash ashore in New England. This debris has negative social, environmental, and economic impacts, such as decreased aesthetic value, harm to coastal ecosystem health, and damage to vessels and gear. These challenges create complex management problems for coastal managers and attorneys, who work to mitigate the creation of new debris and remove and manage debris that washes ashore.

This Symposium will discuss the adequacy of U.S. law and policy to prevent the creation of new marine debris and to remove debris once it is created. The first session will include keynote presentations on the science, law, and policy of marine debris. Speakers will then examine case studies from coastal New England states to consider how each state identified a marine debris problem, took steps to address it, and how the approach could serve as a model elsewhere. Finally, a panel of attorneys will lead a facilitated discussion to identify effective legal and policy strategies to prevent and manage marine debris in New England and to frame questions for future research.