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Press Release

Mayors, Scientists and Citizens Along the Mississippi River Work Together to Tackle Plastic Pollution

Saint Louis, Missouri, April 17, 2021 – The *Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative pilot projects* made a stop in St. Louis, today, the second of three cities along the river. The initiative operates under the leadership of the [Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative \(MRCTI\)](#), the mayors of the Mississippi River in partnership with [the United Nations Environment Programme](#), [National Geographic Society](#), and the [University of Georgia](#).

The event in St. Louis, included many volunteers such as representatives from the City of St. Louis, East St. Louis, Kimmswick, the Greenway Network, Missouri Department of Conservation Stream Team Unit, Brightside St. Louis, Rotary International, and more.

“Today is a great day for the City of St. Louis, and our region, said **Mayor Lyda Krewson, Mayor of St. Louis**, “This effort to stop plastic pollution in the Mississippi River, and eventually our oceans, is part of a larger effort to protect one of the world’s most vital waterways. The Mississippi River built this city and our surrounding area, providing both beauty and opportunity. As stewards of the waterway, we’re excited to be a part of this pilot project.”

“The population of my town swells to nearly 100,000 people during our outdoor festivals generating a lot of solid waste that I would like to ensure never reaches the Mississippi River. Kimmswick is a tourism destination whose success depends on having a clean, litter-free waterfront that attracts outdoor recreation and tourism, explained **Mayor Phil Stang, Mayor of Kimmswick, MO and MRCTI Missouri Chair**.

Plastic waste that continuously enters the Mississippi River poses a large threat to environmental quality and ecosystem. As the drainage system for 40% of the continental United States, plastic waste and other litter travels through storm drains and smaller waterways into the river and its tributaries, ultimately making way to the Gulf of Mexico and into the ocean.

“Today’s launch is not just about reducing solid waste pollution in our cities, it is also about making sure our infrastructure works better and is less compromised by plastic debris that chokes our water systems and degrades our ecology. If restoring our built and natural infrastructure along the Mississippi River is the goal, then we will need to reduce our solid pollution significantly”, asserted **Mayor Robert Eastern III, Mayor of East St. Louis, IL.**

Approximately 8 million metric tons of plastic enters the oceans each year, with rivers contributing to a significant portion of that amount. In 2016, the U.S. generated 42.0Mt of plastic waste, the largest amount of any country in the world, and was the third largest contributor of mismanaged plastic waste to the coastal environment globally. *

“Today is the latest of many exciting events along the river, and we applaud the Mayors from along the Mississippi River for tackling the critical challenge of plastic pollution in our rivers and marine environments,” said Barbara Hendrie, Director of UN Environment Programme’s North America Office. “With just 9% of all plastic being recycled globally, we have to work together to address the way we produce, use and dispose of single-use plastic.”

“Citizen science allows us to work together with communities to capture data on what is entering the environment, close to the source,” said Jenna Jambeck, Distinguished Professor in Environmental Engineering at the University of Georgia and National Geographic Fellow. “This scale of data collection would be impossible without the participation of thousands of community members along the river to inform upstream solutions to plastic pollution.”

The data collected will generate a critical baseline for decision-makers in both the private and public sectors, against which to judge the success of their efforts to reduce plastic pollution flowing into the river and to inspire effective policy action.

Communities along the length of the Mississippi River have joined the effort to combat plastic pollution. Baton Rouge, LA hosted the first event last week on April 10, and St. Paul, MN will host one next Saturday, April 24. Each community has fielded an app, [Marine Debris Tracker](#).

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About the Mississippi Rivers Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI)

MRCTI is a coalition of 100 mayors from across the Mississippi River Basin, which spans nearly a third of the country. The Mississippi River provides drinking water to more than 20 million people and 50 cities. More than 60 billion gallons of fresh water is withdrawn from the river daily. The River’s resources support 1.5 million jobs and create \$496.7 billion in annual revenue.

<https://www.mrcti.org/>

* Jambeck, J. et al. (2020). The United States’ Contribution of Plastic Waste to Land and Ocean. *Journal of Science Advances*, 6(44). DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.abd0288.

About the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. More information on the initiative can be found at

www.unep.org/mississippi.

<https://www.unep.org/regions/north-america>

About the National Geographic Society

The National Geographic Society is a global nonprofit organization that uses the power of science, exploration, education and storytelling to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world. Since 1888, National Geographic has pushed the boundaries of exploration, investing in bold people and transformative ideas, providing more than 14,000 grants for work across all seven continents, reaching 3 million students each year through education offerings, and engaging audiences around the globe through signature experiences, stories and content. Follow along on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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About University of Georgia's Debris Tracker

Debris Tracker is a free mobile app designed to help community members make a difference by contributing data on plastic pollution. Developed in 2010 in partnership with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and currently supported by Morgan Stanley, the Debris Tracker community is creating a bigger picture of marine debris and plastic pollution through collecting open data, generating scientific findings, informing policy, and inspiring upstream design. Every day, dedicated educational, non-profit, and scientific organizations and passionate citizen scientists from all around the world record data on inland and marine debris with the easy-to-use app, with over 3 million items logged to date.

<https://debristracker.org/>