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Volunteers to get drift, bag it on Sept. 20

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PUUNENE - Get the Drift & Bag It, the statewide reef and beach cleanup that supports the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Clean-up program, will be held Sept. 20, Community Work Day Maui said.

The date for the event had been on the Community Work Day calendar for Sept. 13. But in keeping with the international program, it is scheduled for Sept. 20, which will be primary election day in Hawaii.

Chris Woolaway, Ha-waii coordinator for International Coastal Cleanup, acknowledged that timing can interfere with the volunteer effort. But the international project has always been scheduled for the third Saturday of September, which turns out to be primary election day in Hawaii every other year.

"It's something we have to deal with every two years," she said. "All we can do is encourage our volunteers to come out in the morning and vote in the afternoon."

Cleanup volunteers also can vote early. Walk-in absentee voting will be held from Sept. 8 to 18 at the Maui County Clerk's Office, Lahaina Civic Center and the Mitchell Pauole Center on Molokai. Requests for mail-in absentee ballots are being accepted and the county Elections Division reported already receiving mail-in ballots for the primary.

Get the Drift & Bag It has volunteers tallying the amount of litter and debris collected in coastal areas that will be reported by the international organization as a way of documenting the extent of the problem of marine debris. In 2007, the ICC reported 400,000 volunteers in 76 countries collected 6 million pounds of litter from the ocean or waterways.

From the waters of Maui County, volunteers recorded 850 pieces of fishing gear, 1,500 recyclable containers, 500 plastic bags and 6,500 cigarette butts in 8 tons of trash gathered from shorelines and reefs.

The cleanup will be held from 8 a.m. to noon, with a focus on coastal areas, but with neighborhood groups continuing their usual litter pickup projects along roadsides and in public parks.

In announcing Get The Drift & Bag It, Community Work Day Executive Director Rae Chandler noted 2008 is also the International Year of the Reef.

"Maui Nui's citizens are being called to action to stop littering and to pitch in and help clean up our beaches and waterways," her announcement said. "Let's all do our part to maintain the health of our precious reef ecosystems, which our Hawaii culture, sustenance and livelihood depend on."

Community Work Day will provide trash bags, latex gloves and refreshments to volunteer groups. For information, call the agency at 877-2524.

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