

## Discarded fishing line program inspires community

By [Tammy Roberts](#), Hometown News Staff Writer

In the past nine years, more than 28,872 pounds of discarded fishing line has been removed from Brevard County's waters, landfills, beaches, parks and other areas.

In 2008 alone, volunteers recovered 4,882 pounds of line, a known hazard to wildlife, fish, boaters and swimmers.

"The project has been a huge success since its inception, and the community has played a huge role in that," said Chris Koeppel, an environmental specialist with the Brevard County Natural Resources Management Office.

Five years ago, Mr. Koeppel began coordinating the county's Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program, which was started in 2000 through a grant from the Florida Advisory Council on Environmental Education.

At the time, Brevard was the first county in the state to initiate such a program.

The impact this type of discarded fishing line was having on the local environment was increasing each year, and the county was looking for a way to prevent it from happening, Mr. Koeppel said.

Monofilament fishing line, which is a single-strand, high-density nylon material used on reels and in cast nets, is strong and invisible in the water, making it an extreme hazard to the environment.

When discarded, the line can fatally entangle wildlife, poison birds and fish if digested and is a danger to boaters, divers and swimmers, Mr. Koeppel said.

Monofilament line, which is the only type of line collected through the program, can be recycled regardless of weight and test strength. Braided line, such as Spider Wire of Power Pro, is not as easily recycled.

"Based on the great tangles of line I've seen in the Florida Keys for many years, I am confident that currently discarded line stays dangerous to wildlife for decades," Mr. Koeppel said. "You might say these deadly little landmarks outlast many real landmarks."

Through community donations and sponsors, such as Brevard Zoo and Keep Brevard Beautiful, materials are purchased each year to construct disposal containers for the line, which are made from 6-foot PVC pipes.

Mr. Koeppel enlists the assistance of local Boy Scout troops, school clubs and other groups to build the containers, while as many as 30 volunteers from throughout the community help collect the line on a monthly basis.

Currently, there are more than 150 of these containers found at fishing piers, boat ramps and parks throughout the county, including about 42 local bait and tackle shops, which account for the majority of line collected each year.

"Without participation from our local tackle shops, this program would not have taken off like it did," Mr. Koeppel said. "They have been instrumental in supporting our efforts and raising awareness about the hazards that exist."

The primary sponsor of the program, Berkley Fishing, provides display boxes above the disposal containers at each of the tackle shops.

When full, shop owners send the collected line to the Berkley company, which then melts down the line into small pellets that are woven into durable boxes.

The boxes are then transformed into fishing habitats, which are placed in different waterways throughout the country, such as areas where there are drainage issues or where a large fish-kill just occurred, Mr. Koeppel said.

"The disposed line is put back into the environment in a way that is beneficial to fish and wildlife," he said.

In the past year, Mr. Koeppel has worked to expand the program by providing larger fishing line bins aboard local fishing charters and boat docks.

Six freestanding barrels were recently placed at Sebastian Inlet Park and Port Canaveral, while another three were donated to three local charter boats.

"What started out as a simple way to collect fishing line has grown into a community-wide effort to help improve our environment," Mr. Koeppel said. "This has been a huge opportunity for us to expand the program and educate others about the cause."

For information about Brevard County's Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program, visit [www.brevardcounty.us/mrrp](http://www.brevardcounty.us/mrrp) or call (321) 633-2016.