

# Garbage disposal: suggestions for yachts cruising the remote tropical Pacific

Kate Mackay, S/Y STREETCAR

*Based on an article written by Kate for 'A Mariner's Guide to Fiji Shores and Marinas 2014'  
<http://fijimarinas.com/fiji/fiji-conservation/fiji-recycling>*

Ever greater numbers of cruising yachts are now sailing the tropical Pacific. Garbage disposal facilities in some remote atolls and islands can be very informal, and many places are struggling to deal with increasing volumes of modern waste.

Managing your garbage responsibly whilst visiting these fragile and vulnerable environments needs forethought and planning.

Reducing the quantity of your garbage, sorting, storing and eventual disposal in appropriate ways should be part of your 'way of life' here.

## What are the basic things you can do?

- Before provisioning, consider the type and quality of garbage disposal facilities you will find in your cruising area & how you will eventually dispose of things; try to buy accordingly.
- Buy in bulk if you can.
- Prior to setting sail, remove & dispose of (responsibly) all non-essential packaging.
- Minimise the amount of plastic and non bio-degradable packaging brought on-board.
- Always try and use the proper garbage disposal facilities at ports and marinas.
- Think carefully before accepting offers from local villages to dispose of your garbage. Your garbage is your responsibility.



*Landfill in Tarawa atoll, Kiribati*

## Can I throw my garbage in the sea?

It's not very nice to do so particularly near land, and with current international regulations you may find you are breaking the law.

Disposal of ANY plastics anywhere into the sea is prohibited under MARPOL 73/78. You will also find it is prohibited under many national regulations, such as the Fiji Maritime Transport Decree 2013.

There are now strict international laws concerning disposal of food waste into the ocean (see box below).

Garbage dumped in the ocean may disappear from your sight almost immediately, but it is definitely not gone.

### Time taken for objects to dissolve at sea

Paper bus ticket	2-4 weeks
Cotton cloth	1-5 months
Rope	3-14 months
Woollen cloth	1 year
Painted wood	13 years
Tin can	100 years
Aluminium can	200-500 years
Plastic bottle	450 years

*Source: Hellenic Marine Environment Protection Association*

## Can I burn my garbage?

Burning your garbage is not a good option. It is bad for you, your children and the environment. It is also illegal for you to do so in many countries, including Fiji.

A regular garbage beach burn, particularly one containing any plastics, will create cancer causing dioxins and other toxins.

The toxic pollutants can travel long distances and deposit on soil, plants, and in water. Animals and fish can ingest the pollutants, plants can absorb them, and they can be passed on to people when contaminated food is eaten. The poisons are persistent, meaning they accumulate in your body, in the food chain and may be passed on to the next generation.

### It's all about the temperature of the burn...

Unlike a modern industrial incinerator, garbage bonfires simply don't get hot enough.

Ten pounds of garbage burned in an open barrel can produce as much air pollution as a modern well-controlled incinerator burning 400,000lbs of garbage per day.

## International regulations

...are contained in Annex V of the IMO International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (**MARPOL 73/78**). Recent amendments (Jan 2013) set new, more stringent, requirements.

A ship is defined as '*a vessel of any type whatsoever operating in the marine environment*'.

Over 150 countries have signed up to Annex V. If your boat is flagged under a country that is a signatory to MARPOL, it is subject to MARPOL requirements regardless of where it sails.

According to MARPOL, in the Pacific, food waste only can be discharged into the ocean. If the waste has been comminuted or ground (i.e. able to pass through a screen or mesh with holes of no larger than 25mm) discharge is allowed 3 miles or more from the nearest land and en route. If it is not ground, discharge is only permitted 12 miles or more from the nearest land and en route.

Discharge of all other garbage is prohibited. This includes plastics, ropes, fishing gear, cooking oil, packing material, paper, rags, glass, metal, bottles and crockery.

There are additional regulations relevant to larger vessels.

## How can I deal with my on-board garbage?

- Be prepared to store your non-degradable and toxic garbage on board until you can reach a proper disposal facility (i.e. batteries, plastics, cans, tetra paks).
- Consider investing in a large air tight container to store organic waste.
- Before storing plastic and cans, wash first (salt water is fine), dry and then compact tightly.
- Consider storing bags of garbage in the chain locker (outside boat yet protected from sun).
- Reduce, re-use and recycle whenever you can.



Mamanuca's, Fiji Islands