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By JEANNETTE J. LEE

The Associated Press

Thursday, May 19, 2005; 5:11 AM

HONOLULU -- Cigarettes and food wrappers were the most common types of trash plucked from beaches in a worldwide coastal cleanup last year, statistics show.

More than 300,000 volunteers from 88 countries removed nearly 4,000 tons of litter and debris during The Ocean Conservancy's daylong shoreline cleanup in September.

In Hawaii, volunteers fanned out along beaches and waterways, including the seldom-visited Slipper Island near the Honolulu International Airport.

"It was like that whole island was built on plastic bags," Chris Woolaway, coordinator of the Hawaii cleanup, said Wednesday. "It's an incredible amount of stuff that ends up on our beaches."

Of the more than 7.1 million pieces of trash collected worldwide, cigarettes accounted for 1.3 million, or about 18 percent, while food wrappers and containers came in next at almost 11 percent. People using the shoreline for recreational activities generated about 72 percent of the trash, the environmental advocacy group said.

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In Canada, the coastal cleanup netted oddities including love letters, a full bottle of wine, a parking meter top, a 10-pound bag of onions and a hula hoop, said Tara Taylor, director of conservation programs at the Vancouver Aquarium & Marine Science Center in British Columbia.

Marine debris such as fishing line and nets can damage coral reefs and kill sea animals, according to The Ocean Conservancy, whose members are in Honolulu for the cleanup's annual conference, which begins Friday.

U.S. participation was the highest, with 158,000 volunteers clearing almost 2,000 tons of debris from more than 8,000 miles of beaches, streams and riverbanks.

The Ocean Conservancy, a Washington-based advocacy group, has organized the International Coastal Cleanup for the past 19 years.

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