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COAST NOTES



A Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Services Publication

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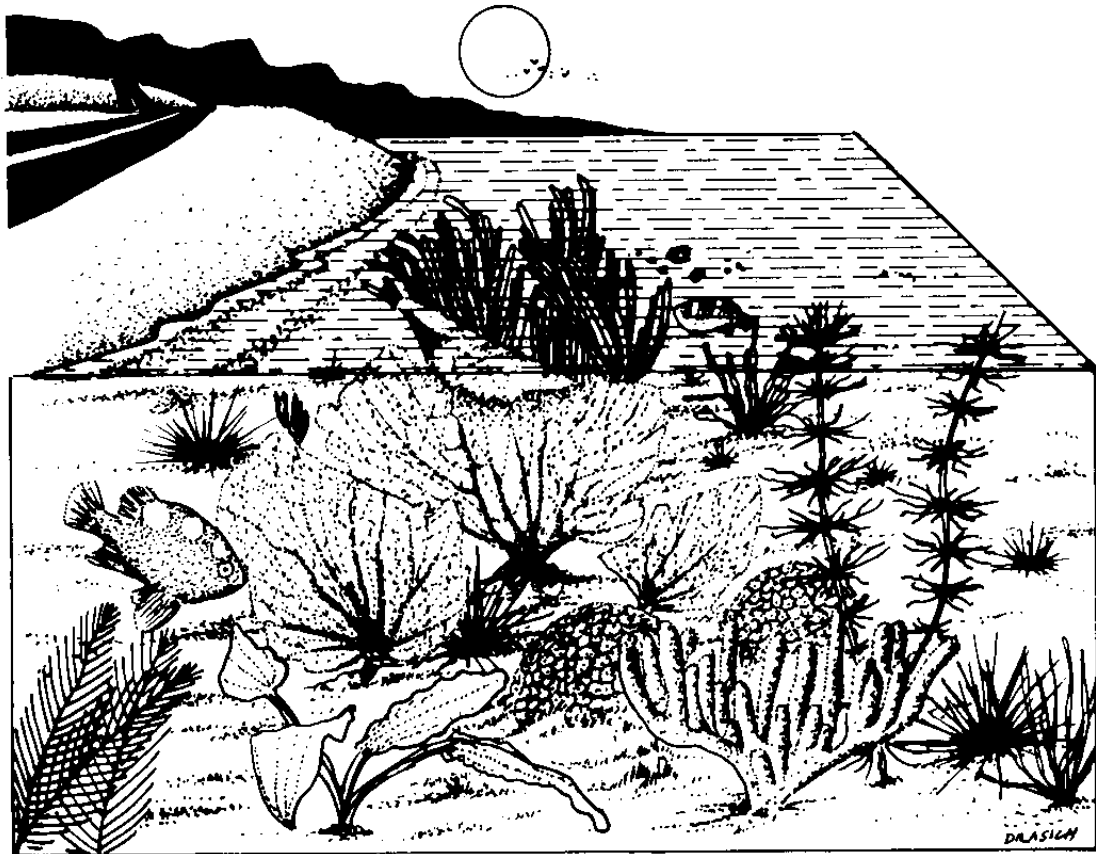
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Clean Roads, Clean Reefs

Keeping the Virgin Islands Clean



The Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Services (VIMAS) invite all Virgin Islanders to take part in the Virgin Islands' **Clean Roads, Clean Reefs** campaign. Thousands of Virgin Island residents and visitors from around the world come to the Virgin Islands shores every day in search of recreation and relaxation. To enhance the pleasure of everyone's experience, it is important that we respect our home and protect our future by **keeping our beaches and coral reefs clean.**

Our coasts are the most used and abused environments on the U.S. Virgin Islands. And our beaches are our biggest tourist attractions. The natural resources associated with the beaches and turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea attract all types of beach goers: swimmers, soakers, surfers, sailboarders, SCUBA and skin divers, fishermen, sunbathers and picnickers. Many of the recreational activities we enjoy are directly dependent upon our marine and coastal resources, especially our coral reefs.

Coral reefs are among the most biologically important ecosystems in the world. They provide food and shelter for a variety of marine animals. Many species of the fish and seafood we eat spend at least part of their lives in the reefs. Fishermen depend on healthy reefs for their livelihood. Our reefs also act as barriers to protect our shorelines from heavy wave action, reducing erosion and creating calmer areas where seagrass beds and mangroves (two other very important marine habitats of the Virgin Islands) can flourish.

The health of our beaches and coral reefs plays a vital role in maintaining a healthy economy on our islands. And yet for all their importance, we actually know very little about coral reefs. Scientists and researchers speculate that the cures for cancer, AIDS and other diseases may one day be found through studies of the many life forms inhabiting coral reefs.

The multiple uses and users of our coastal resources subject our reefs to many stresses. Pollution, sediment from storm water runoff, damage from divers and boat anchors, and improper waste disposal practices can all cause irreparable damage to marine resources, including reefs.

One form of pollution that causes stress to our marine and coastal environments, is litter. Aluminum

cans, plastic bags, food containers, newspapers, bottles, straws, and used diapers are common sights along our beaches. The problem is that too many of us have come to accept these sights as a "natural" part of the marine scene. Litter tossed

anywhere on the island can end up on our beaches and in the water. This not only spoils the beauty of our beaches, it can also cause serious health problems for all beach users. And

litter can kill the corals, fish, birds and other organisms that maintain nature's balance on the islands.

The economic, esthetic and environmental value of our coral reefs can not be underestimated. While many of the threats they face are beyond our control as individuals, it's up to each of us to do our best to protect the reefs and coastal areas of the Virgin Islands. Don't allow trash to spoil our greatest natural resource or interfere with our enjoyment of it.

The preservation of our coasts and reefs is everyone's responsibility. Write or call us to find out how you or your group can get involved.

by *Lynne Hinkey-MacDonald*
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