



COAST NOTES



A Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Services Publication

VIMAS is a branch of

the University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant College Program & the University of the Virgin Islands Eastern Caribbean Center.



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You can help protect our corals

1. Never stand on or touch the coral reef.

Coral is **not** a rock. Each coral colony is made up of tiny living animals called **polyps**, which are closely related to sea anemones. Touching, holding, standing on, sitting on or kicking coral can crush and kill these animals. The coral polyps are connected and completely interdependent. **When you harm one, you hurt the entire colony.** It may take years for a coral to fully recover from an injury, and corals grow very slowly. Even small breakages can cause long-term or even irreparable damage. If you must stand while swimming, snorkeling or diving, please stand only on sandy-bottomed areas.

2. Don't feed the fish.

Bread, cooked vegetables, cheese and other human foods are indigestible for fish. They may fill up on these foods, but they can't assimilate the nutrients so may easily become weakened or sick. In addition, these foods disturb the natural balance of ocean life and may contribute to harmful algae growth and the decline of other species.

3. Swim without stirring up the sand.

Stirred up sand can cover corals, sponges and other animals and plants. This is called **siltation**, and it **can injure or even kill these organisms.** Besides, sand suspended in the water column interferes with our view of fish and other marine life. Keep track of where you kick your feet and flippers. Make sure they don't touch the coral or stir up the sand.

4. Pick up any trash you find in the water and place it in a garbage can.

If no garbage cans are available, take trash home and dispose of it properly. Plastic bags and other litter in the water may be mistaken for food by turtles, sea birds and other organisms. If eaten, marine debris can suffocate and starve animals. Or it may entangle or otherwise fatally injure them.

5. Use only waterproof sunscreen.

Some sunscreens wash off in the water and become a pollutant. At high-use beaches, washed off sunscreen can pose a real problem for marine plants and animals. Use only waterproof sunscreen or wear a t-shirt when you swim.

6. Use the restrooms.

Urine adds unwanted nutrients to the water. These nutrients encourage algae growth, which can limit the amount of sunlight that reaches the reef. Corals depend on sunlight for energy. With insufficient light, reefs will die.

7. Take only photos. Leave only footprints.

The health of our marine ecosystems depends upon a delicate balance of many natural processes. Removing organisms from the waters or beaches, or adding any new substances (trash, food, pollutants) can seriously disturb the balance Nature has created. To ensure the beauty and health of the Virgin Islands environment for future visits and for future generations, please take only photos and leave only footprints.

8. Share this information with a friend.

Teach others to care for the Virgin Islands' reefs and beaches for the enjoyment of all.

