

Surfriders 'leave only footprints' initiative helps keep beach clean

Campaign urges visitors to put trash in cans placed along beach, not in sand

CHRISTINE CULLEN

■ Staff Writer

(April 27, 2007) The first year of a campaign to clean up Ocean City's beaches was so successful that the local chapter of the Surfrider Foundation hopes to continue the program and add some initiatives this summer.

Michael Brian and Terry Steimer of the Surfriders Foundation presented an overview of the group's "Leave Only Your Footprints" campaign at the City Council meeting on April 16.

The first step of the five-year campaign began in 2006, Steimer said, with volunteers from the Surfriders, Stephen Decatur High School and Salisbury University painting beach trashcans with the "Leave Only Your Footprints" slogan designed to encourage visitors to use the receptacles to dispose of their garbage. The 725 trashcans were used all summer and Steimer said the difference in the cleanliness of the beach was immediately evident.

"People have definitely noticed them," he said. "We felt people only needed a nudge to do the right thing."

For the upcoming season, Steimer said the Surfriders plan to continue advertising the message on banner planes, the city's cable access channel, on the convention center sign and on signs posted at each beach access point. One initiative he wants to pursue required the council's approval: stenciling the slogan on the back of the city's garbage trucks.

Although this was the first time the city had heard the idea, the council supported the project, and Public Works Director Hal Adkins said he would work with the Surfriders to coordinate which trucks to paint.

Steimer also raised another issue related to beach cleanliness. The area under the inlet pier is often littered with garbage, he said, and although the Surfriders supported the construction of a dune under the western portion of the pier, Steimer said that was not enough to fix the problem.

He made the suggestion of erecting a sign in Spanish directing beachgoers toward the trashcans and other facilities on the Boardwalk, as the majority of visitors who spend time under the pier tend to be of Hispanic origin. While the council was somewhat hesitant to go to such lengths, Mayor Rick Meehan said an alternative of printing the "Leave Only Your Footprints" slogan in Spanish on trashcans in that area could be a solution.