

# THE WRACK LINE

## ALIVE AND IMPORTANT ON FLORIDA'S BEACHES



Wrack lines on Marco Island's Beach



Gastropod egg casing, leaf, and shell wrack debris

Florida's beach is alive! It may look like endless stretches of sand and, of course, there are obvious beach-life, such as the plants in the dunes, the birds sitting on the sand, or maybe a visible scurrying crab, but stick your toe in the wet sand near the surf and you may be surprised by unearthing a coquina shell that digs back into the sand rapidly or a sea star lying just barely covered with sand. The beach is full of living organisms!

Walking the beach you will see a line of debris at the high tide line. This is called the **Wrack Line**. It is the lengthy piles of floating marine debris that has washed-in with the tide. It typically is composed of natural items like alga, especially sargassum, uprooted sea grasses, reedy marsh plants, shells, and egg casings. The wrack line can also have manmade debris like fishing lures, line, wood and metal from boats, crab floats, sea glass and trash.

Daily tidal events bring and take items on and off the beach. Storm events will also bring heavy loads of wrack to a beach. There may be one, two or several wrack lines on the beach indicating where tides have reached. Many plants and sea animals end their life's journey by washing onto the beach and becoming part of the wrack line. They provide a very important base to the beach food web. Shorebirds walk the wrack line, picking at dead or dying shellfish; crabs scurrying to get small fish and shellfish that have washed up; and below the sand surface, marine worms and invertebrates, use the decomposing wrack as nutrients and substance to survive.

The Marco Island beach is regularly raked by Collier County Coastal Zone Department. The rake grooms the sandy, recreational areas of the beach, but must stay at least 15 feet from the dune line and 15 feet from the wrack line. This is to protect the beach life in these areas. Wrack lines should not be raked up. The debris that builds up is one of the most important areas of a living beach's food web. Manmade trash, of course, should and is removed, but natural debris is what keeps a beach healthy.

*For more information, please contact the Environmental Specialist at the City of Marco Island at 239-389-5003 or [nrichie@cityofmarcoisland.com](mailto:nrichie@cityofmarcoisland.com)*