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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Annual Coastal Cleanup Day to Engage Tsunami Debris First Responders as
Debris Makes its Way to California Coast**

San Diego, CA – Exactly seventeen months ago, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck off the coast of Japan, producing a powerful tsunami. That wall of water reached 133 feet high and devastated 220 square miles, roughly 2/3 of the size of the City of San Diego. The tsunami resulted in massive damages to Japan, but as time goes by, more focus is being shifted onto the damage posed to the global marine environment. Local environmental organization I Love A Clean San Diego is poised to represent San Diego County in a statewide response team tasked with identifying and removing tsunami debris from the local coastline.

The Japanese government estimated that 5 million tons of debris from the earthquake and tsunami washed into the Pacific Ocean. Of that debris, roughly 3.5 million tons sank immediately, while the other 1.5 million tons were buoyant enough to enter the Pacific Ocean currents, slowly making its way toward the West Coast of the United States. Over the past seventeen months, the Japanese Government and US federal agencies have attempted to predict debris movement, however tsunami debris has been reported making landfall on the West Coast much earlier than initial estimations.

In order to combat this influx of ocean-based marine debris, I Love A Clean San Diego plans to engage thousands of volunteers as first responders as part of a statewide initiative. The annual Coastal Cleanup Day event, scheduled for Saturday September 15th, 2012, represents an ideal opportunity for San Diegans to join in this response effort. The organization hopes to engage roughly 8,000 volunteers in cleanup activities, both along the coastline as well as inland at local canyons, creeks, parks, and urban areas.

Past I Love A Clean San Diego staff member Shannon Waters recently returned from a 28 research voyage aimed at tracking the tsunami debris as well as acquiring more data on the under-researched Western Pacific Garbage Patch. Her 3,800 mile voyage with 5 Gyres, proved that characterizing marine debris that resulted from the tsunami against marine debris from other sources was challenging. According to Shannon, “the plastic pieces that were more intact were more likely to be Japanese tsunami debris. For example, we found a bucket that was whole and had a minimal amount of growth on it, another indicator of how long things have been at sea. And it had Japanese characters on it, but we couldn’t know for certain that it came from the tsunami on March 11th, as opposed to washing from the shore a few days before.”

It is important to note that while 1.5 million tons of marine debris seems like a massive figure, this latest high-profile case of ocean debris represents just a small part of the overall ocean trash problem. A tsunami’s worth of ocean trash is created every year. Join I Love A Clean San Diego to stop trash at its source and help make a dent in marine debris at Coastal Cleanup Day.

I Love A Clean San Diego is the go-to organization for programs that preserve San Diego’s local environment. Through recycling, education, and cleanups of our most beloved areas, I Love A Clean San Diego is the only community based organization dedicated to the future of the entire county – from inland to the coast, in every community, for generations to come. For more information, visit www.cleansd.org.

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