



Florida Department of  
Environmental Protection  
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## **CORAL REEFS**

Coral reefs create specialized habitats that provide shelter, food and breeding sites for numerous plants and animals. Corals lay the foundation for a dynamic ecosystem with tremendous biodiversity. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI), and others are working to eliminate or minimize potential damage and threats to neighboring corals during the Osborne Reef tire removal process.

Strong ocean currents can cause submerged tires to come into contact with existing corals, causing significant damage. The damage caused by shifting underwater tires can take decades to repair and leave corals vulnerable to bacteria and disease. The removal of waste tires will virtually eliminate a major threat to coral reefs in the immediate area surrounding the Osborne Reef and allow natural habitats to develop.

Coral reef development occurs only in areas with specific environmental characteristics: a solid structure for attachment, warm water temperatures, clear waters low in phosphate and nitrogen nutrients, and moderate wave action to disperse wastes and bring oxygen and plankton to the reef. Most of Florida's sport fish species and many other marine animals spend significant parts of their lives around coral reefs. Any corals growing on waste tires will be carefully removed by scientists and replanted on neighboring reefs.

Unfortunately, coral cover on many Caribbean reefs has declined up to 80 percent over the past three decades. Southeast Florida reefs, which are a part of the greater Caribbean reef system, are monitored for diseases, bleaching and other problems associated with human activities. Physical contact from fins, hands, or equipment of boaters, divers, snorkelers and fishermen can damage delicate corals. Ships and other vessels that run aground or drop anchor on reefs can dislodge, overturn and crush corals.

DEP and SEFCRI programs educate residents and visitors about our diverse near shore coral resources, the benefits of these resources, as well as conservation actions that individuals can take to protect our coral reefs and marine environment.

**For more information visit:**

<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/programs/coral/>

<http://www.southeastfloridareefs.net>