

Press Release

Coastwatch No Bleach Near Water Campaign.

29th of May 2026

Contacts: Karin Dubsy 086-8111684 kdubsy@coastwatch.org

Elise Merckel merckel.el@gmail.com

Coastwatch is calling all who use and maintain slipways and sea steps: **don't use bleach** or products based on it. It's illegal, kills marine life and is corrosive to skin.

This message is captured in the Coastwatch poster launched by Enda O'Coineen on the Spirit of Shackleton in Dun Laoghaire harbour on Fri 29th May 2026.

Elise Merckel Coastwatch student intern from France said: *'I designed this as an alert poster so sodium hypochlorite - generically known as bleach here – will no longer be used on slipways, sea promenades and sea steps'*. She added: *'It's not just a problem in Ireland; perhaps we should translate the poster'*.

Karin Dubsy, Coastwatch Director said: *'When a round the world sailor on a top racing yacht now focussing on exploration and youth development brings that message it will be heard'*. She added: *'I was delighted when I met top sailor Peter Scallan who told me that the Spirit of Shackleton is only cleaning with water and small amounts of vinegar and baking soda. A good understanding of cleaning - what to use why – as part of the sail experience and youth training will ensure that the days of hazardous chemicals for cleaning are over.'* She added *'On land, Coastwatch would love authorities to put up posters next to harbours and bathing waters where those cleaning in private capacity may not be aware of the impacts and law to promote compliance'*.

Note to the Editor

Coastwatch work on cleaning of sea steps and slipways was triggered by concerned families with small children reporting smelling bleach or witnessing products being used on sea steps and slipways and their kids complaining of burning skin. Others saw marine animals die on rocks around cleaned areas and wanted to know was it legal. Coastwatch then started research and confirmed that it is unauthorised whether sold as bleach or under a brand name with sodium hypochlorite as ingredient.

To understand whether this hazardous chemical use was just a local problem, Coastwatch carried out a national [survey of slipways and sea steps cleaning](#) in 2024, to establish what cleaning methods were in use nationally and found that bleach based products were a chosen treatment in a number of counties.

Bleach – Sodium hypochlorite is an alkaline inorganic chemical compound NaOCl (also written as NaClO) which does lots of things like bleaching whites and killing green slippery seaweeds. Unfortunately it also kills other marine organisms in a most miserable way, and is classed as hazardous chemicals which require gloves and safety gear to be worn during use. Not attire which children would be wearing when using sea steps straight after such application.

The **Water Pollution Act of 1997** states a “general prohibition on entry of polluting matter to waters”.

Talking to some in charge of cleaning, Coastwatch noted a common belief that bleach based products are the best to address slippery marine surfaces and that trumped any other concern. So how do we navigate that thin line of safe sea steps, sea promenades and slipways without an aura of kill all around them?

Coastwatch then planned experiments trying other environmentally and legally acceptable methods as a more4nature citizen science collaboration with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Sandycove Kayak Club and Bunzl Ireland. The latter not only gave equipment but also helped scrub to be able to advise their customers on the efficiency of what they were selling. Results were shared on the 7th of May 2026, along with a public seaweed removal demonstration using different brushes and aids. To highlight the wealth of marine life on our shores and its vulnerability public shore fieldtrips were organised by Coastwatch and Dun Laoghaire County Council.

The cleaning experiment report and recommendations are on www.coastwatch.org showcasing ecological cleaning methods avoiding hazardous chemical use.

Key Experiment Findings

Hazardous chemicals are not necessary: Volunteers were able to clean the sample areas using brushes, water and sand alone and also with a non-hazardous cleaning product. Indicator limpets beside the sea steps were still in their home scars 5 weeks later.

Brush type: Steel brushes and natural fibre brushes were tested side by side. The steel brushes were more effective, but awkward to handle. Volunteers recommend sourcing more ergonomic steel brushes shaped like deck brushes.

Sand, improved the abrasive power when brushing algae and biofilm off.

Things got easier: The first cleaning required most muscle power. Subsequent cleaning of new algal growth took less time.

Seepage draining onto a slipway can give green algae a massive head start between cleanings, especially if the seepage is nutrient rich. Sealing cracks or redirecting water and addressing nutrient sources will prevent these extra dangerous localised slip hazards.

Coastwatch broader Action Recommendations

Compliance assurance: Local authorities should engage all their relevant teams to ensure that council workers and contractors are not using hazardous chemicals to clean slipways and sea steps, and that they are aware of the 1977 Local Government (Water Pollution) Act’s “[general prohibition on entry of polluting matter to waters](#)”. They should also inform sea sports clubs and others who rely on the amenities and may independently help maintain them.

Promotion: Coastwatch Regional Coordinators suggested:’ We would love an Oscars for slipways and sea steps... *Best Designed* to help nature do its work, *Best Maintained* for the people who have taken care to clean the amenities in eco-friendly way.

Market surveillance: There are cleaning products for sale in Ireland which contain hazardous chemicals like bleach, advertised as “seaweed remover”. Coastwatch is calling on government to investigate these and ensure that misleading purpose information is removed. DAFFM has not licensed any bleach based products for use at water, but given that there have been no enforcement cases we could find, it is understandable that people think what they

buy is legal. Citizens can help by checking labels. The most common unauthorised chemicals used are bleach based - [sodium hypochlorite](#), or **NaOCl** (also written as NaClO).

Coastwatch, founded in 1987 in Ireland, is an environmental group working for informed public participation in environmental management, protection and restoration. The group specialises in citizen science, protects wetlands and coastal environment by raising public awareness of their values, and demonstrating practical ways to save and restore them.

The survey and slipways cleaning experiment are part of a four-year Horizon Europe project called [more4nature](#), which aims to reverse the trend in environmental degradation by including citizens and communities as key actors in collaborative environmental compliance assurance.

...END...