Press Release

Mayors, Scientists and Citizens Along the Mississippi River Work Together to Tackle Plastic Pollution Throughout the Quad Cities Region

Bettendorf, Iowa 15 October 2021 – Today, Mayors along the Mississippi River are coming together to support plastic pollution data collection in the Quad Cities region through the Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative. The initiative operates under the leadership of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) and the mayors of the Mississippi River, in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme and the University of Georgia.

Using the free 'Debris Tracker' app developed by the University of Georgia, community volunteers will help track plastics and other trash to help scientists, policy-makers, businesses, and community members take informed action to combat pollution in their communities.

All data collected during this time is open-sourced and will be analyzed to better understand the state of plastic pollution along the Mississippi River. This pilot phase in the Quad Cities will be the first of its kind in the area in an ongoing endeavor to promote education and outreach about plastics in freshwater systems.

"Citizen science allows us to work together with communities to capture data on what is entering the environment, close to the source," said Jenna Jambeck, Distinguished Professor in Environmental Engineering at the University of Georgia and National Geographic Fellow. "This scale of data collection would be impossible without the participation of thousands of community members along the river to inform upstream solutions to plastic pollution."

Plastic waste that continuously enters the Mississippi River poses a large threat to environmental quality and ecosystem. As the drainage system for 40% of the continental United States, plastic waste and other litter travels through storm drains and smaller waterways into the river and its tributaries, ultimately making way to the Gulf of Mexico and into the ocean.

Approximately 11 million metric tons of plastic enters the oceans each year, with rivers contributing to a significant portion of that amount. In 2016, the U.S. generated 42.0Mt of plastic waste, the largest amount of any country in the world, and was the third largest contributor of mismanaged plastic waste to the coastal environment globally. *

“We are delighted that the Quad Cities’ have stepped up to tackle plastic pollution along the Mississippi River, through this citizen science-based initiative,” said **Barbara Hendrie, Director of UN Environment Programme’s North America Office.** “We need to tackle marine litter at source and at sea, including in our major river systems. Thanks to Quad Cities for this leadership.”

The data collected will generate a critical baseline for decision-makers in both the private and public sectors, against which to judge the success of their efforts to reduce plastic pollution flowing into the river and to inspire effective policy action.

“The reduction of pollution in the river will not only benefit our community’s health and pride, but it will also make our primary drinking source more secure,” said Mayor Bob Gallagher, Mayor of Bettendorf, IA. “The Mississippi River is America’s most essential inland waterway, providing hundreds of billions of gallons of water each day to key industries, as well as drinking water to 20 million people in 50 cities in 10 states, as it does for us in the Quad Cities.”

“Today is a great day for the Quad Cities, the Mississippi River Watershed, and all of our waterways, said Mayor Mike Thoms, Mayor of Rock Island, IL, “As a city bordered by two waterways, the Mississippi and Rock Rivers, floatable waste and all its impacts are particularly felt in my community. Waterways and ports support over 48,000 Illinois jobs and directly contribute $6.4 billion to our state’s economy. Thus, it is vital we learn where waste is and whose it is so we can create change.”

“The Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative was born out of a need for collaboration, which makes sense for the implementation of the initiative here in the Quad Cities Region. Having adjacent Illinois and Iowa communities from Clinton to Muscatine come together to participate is a great demonstration of collaboration across our region. The importance of this initiative is indicated by this alliance, said Mayor Scott Maddasion, Mayor of Clinton, IA and MRCTI Iowa State Chair.

Communities throughout the Quad Cities area have joined the effort to combat plastic pollution, which will be taking place from 1 – 31 October 2021. These areas include: Bettendorf, IA; Davenport, IA; East Moline, IL; Moline, IL; Riverdale, IA; Rock Island, IL; Port Byron, IL, and Coal Valley, IL.

# # #

About the Mississippi Rivers Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI)
MRCTI is a coalition of 100 mayors from across the Mississippi River Basin, which spans nearly a third of the country. The Mississippi River provides drinking water to more than 20 million people and 50 cities. More than 60 billion gallons of fresh water is withdrawn from the river daily. The River’s resources support 1.5 million jobs and create $496.7 billion in annual revenue.
https://www.mrcti.org/

* Jambeck, J. et al. (2020). The United States’ Contribution of Plastic Waste to Land and Ocean. *Journal of Science Advances*, 6(44). DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.abd0288.

About the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. More information on the initiative can be found at www.unep.org/mississippi.
https://www.unep.org/regions/north-america

About University of Georgia's Debris Tracker
Debris Tracker is a free mobile app designed to help community members make a difference by contributing data on plastic pollution. Developed in 2010 in partnership with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and currently supported by Morgan Stanley, the Debris Tracker community is creating a bigger picture of marine debris and plastic pollution through collecting open data, generating scientific findings, informing policy, and inspiring upstream design. Every day, dedicated educational, non-profit, and scientific organizations and passionate citizen scientists from all around the world record data on inland and marine debris with the easy-to-use app, with over 3 million items logged to date.
https://debristracker.org/

* Jambeck, J. et al. (2020). The United States' Contribution of Plastic Waste to Land and Ocean. *Journal of Science Advances*, 6(44). DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.abd0288.