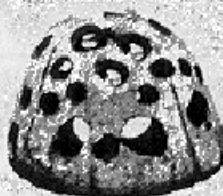


What are reef balls?



A reef ball that was recently put in the sea.

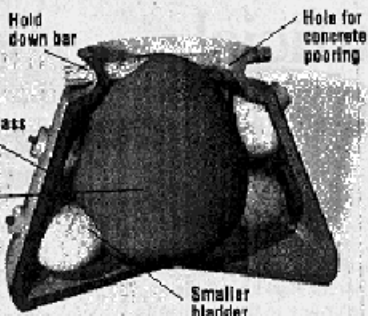


A reef ball that has attracted marine life.

Reef balls are artificial habitats designed to supplement or repair ocean reefs damaged by man's activities and natural disasters, or to build new ones. They provide a foundation for restoring marine life habitat and promote the growth of coral and sea plants. There are more than 250 sites worldwide, with several in Florida.

How are they made?

Concrete is poured into a fiberglass mold around a Polyform bladder that's much like a big beach ball. Smaller "balloons" are positioned to make exterior holes. Where they touch, the holes interconnect. The surface is textured to allow creatures to latch on.



How big are they?



Reef balls come in sizes ranging from 6 inches to more than 6 feet. They can weigh up to 7,500 pounds. The balls are flat-ish on the bottom and bottom-heavy to withstand movement even when waters are stormy. Detailed information on their size and manufacture can be found at <http://www.reefball.org> on the Internet.

How are they used?

Building an artificial reef usually requires getting a government permit. Reef balls can be floated to a site and positioned in the water. Large installations sometimes use "pallets" or "slabs" that hold more than one reef ball. Reef balls also are being combined in sea wall, dock and recreational pier projects. They can be placed in oceans, bays, canals, estuaries and aquariums.



Reef balls on the beach, ready to deploy.

Source: Reef Ball Development Group, Ltd.

TIM PRICE/Tribune graphic