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# **10 Million TONS Of Trash Floating In Pacific**

By Frosty Wooldridge  
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If you should see this amazing floating pile of plastic in the Pacific Ocean, it's called "The Great Pacific Garbage Patch." It features three million tons of plastic debris floating in an area larger than Texas. An eye-popping 46,000 pieces of plastic float on every square mile of ocean! Humans toss another 2.5 million pieces into our oceans hourly.

Captain Paul Watson, [www.seashepard.org](http://www.seashepard.org), composed an essay, "The Plastic Sea." He wrote a penetrating piece on humanity's desecration of our oceans. If you ever see this plastic 'monster' as I have, it will sicken you to the core of your soul. But the terror it manifests sickens you further!

"On the beach on San Juan Island, Washington, Allison Lance walks her dogs every morning," Watson said. "She carries a plastic bag in her hand to carry the bits and pieces of plastic debris she picks up. Each morning she fills the bag, but by the next morning there is always another bag to be filled. Joey Racano does the same in Huntington Beach further south in California. The harvest of plastic waste is never-ending. Allison's and Joey's beaches, and practically every beach around the world is similarly cursed.

"Recently in the Galapagos I retrieved plastic motor oil bottles and garbage bags from a remote beach on Santa Cruz island. Every year during crossings of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans, spotting plastic is a daily and regular occurrence."

Let me repeat this: the United Nations Environmental Program report estimated 46,000 pieces of plastic debris floats on or near the surface of every square mile of ocean.

"We live in a plastic convenience culture; every human being on this planet uses plastic materials directly and indirectly every single day,"

Watson said. "Our babies begin life on Earth by using some 210 million pounds of plastic diaper liners each year; we give them plastic milk bottles, plastic toys, and buy their food in plastic jars.

"Every year we eat and drink from some thirty-four billion newly manufactured bottles and containers. We patronize fast food restaurants and buy products that consume another fourteen billion pounds of plastic. In total, our societies produce an estimated sixty billion tons of plastic material every year.

"Each of us on average uses 190 pounds of plastic annually: bottled water, fast food packaging, furniture, syringes, computers and computer diskettes, packing materials, garbage bags and so much more. When you consider that this plastic does not biodegrade and remains in our ecosystems permanently, we are looking at an incredibly high volume of accumulated plastic trash that has been built up since the mid-twentieth century."

You may ask, "Where does it go?" The answer grows uglier every day: the ground, air and into our oceans!

All the plastic that has ever been produced has been buried in landfills, incinerated, and dumped into lakes, rivers, and oceans. When incinerated, the plastics disperse non-biodegradable pollutants, much of which inevitably find their way into marine ecosystems as microscopic particles.

"Back in 1991, my ship, the Sea Shepherd, was anchored in the harbor of Port of Spain, Trinidad," Captain Watson said. "A few hours later, the entire surface area of the harbor was dirty white, as if an ice floe had entered this tropical port. The "floe" consisted of Styrofoam, plastic bottles, and assorted plastic materials, as far as the eye could see, and it had come down from the streets, gutters, and streams into the harbor. And, of course, it was all washing out to sea, dispersed by wind and tide.

"What happened to it after that? The sun and the brine broke it down into little pellets of Styrofoam and little pieces of plastic - each an insidious, floating, deadly mine set adrift in an ocean of life.

"And over the years these little nodules have drifted. Many have been ingested by birds and fish. Weeks or months later, their victims decompose on the surface of the water or on a beach, re-exposing the nodules to the light of the sun, to be blown by the winds back into the sea. These vicious little inorganic parasites continue to maim and kill in an endless assault upon life in our oceans."

The simple fact is that when you drop a Styrofoam cup onto the street, you're causing more damage than you would by dropping a stick of dynamite into the ocean. You set in motion an invasion of thousands of killer plastibots that will cause death and destruction for centuries to

come.

"Eighteen billion of those disposable diapers end up in the oceans each year," Watson said. "Americans alone toss 2.5 million plastic bottles into the sea every hour. There is no place in the oceans where a fine trawl will not reveal plastic nodules. Studies by Captain Charles Moore and the Algalita Foundation found that even in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, plastic nodules have been found to outweigh plankton by a ratio of six to one."

In the movie "Castaway," Tom Hanks, marooned on a desert island in the South Pacific, finds a plastic siding of a portable outhouse washed up on the beach. The stuff floats everywhere. Watson found plastic bottles with Japanese, Chinese, Russian, and English writing littering the beaches of even the most remote Aleutian Islands.

"Drifting in our seas are tens of thousands of miles of monofilament ghost drift nets and lines," Watson said. "This same netting ensnares ship prows and the necks of sea lions and turtles. Over the years, my crews have retrieved hundreds of floating monofilament nets from the sea. All of them contained the rotting corpses of fish and birds."

"In a well-documented beach clean-up in Orange County, California, volunteers collected 106 million items, weighing thirteen tons. The debris included preproduction plastic pellets, foamed plastics, and hard plastics; plastic constituted 99 percent of the total material collected. The most abundant item found on the beaches of Orange County was preproduction plastic pellets, most of which originated from transport losses. Approximately one quadrillion of these pellets, or 60 billion pounds, are annually manufactured in the United States alone. You never hear about these spillages in the newspaper, and there is not a single plastic pellet spillage response crew anywhere in the world."

Watson continued, "Oil spills occur every day in our oceans, and major spills occur on average every two weeks somewhere in the world's marine ecosystem. Although these oil spills are notorious killers of marine wildlife, their deadly impact is confined to relatively small areas geographically, and the impact is reduced with time. The Exxon Valdez spill, for example, was confined to Alaska's Prince William Sound, and although the impact on wildlife was felt for many years, the ecosystem recovered. Yet this other kind of petrochemical spill is more invasive and permanent."

"I don't think that I am exaggerating when I say that the spillage of plastic resin pellets poses a significant and unappreciated threat to survival of sea life. The oceans are becoming plasticized. The impact of this spillage contributes to more casualties than all of the world's annual oil spills, yet we know very little about the problem."

Captain Watson added, "Of 312 species of seabirds, some 111 species, or 36 percent, are known to mistakenly ingest plastic. In Hawaii,

sixteen of the eighteen resident seabird species are plastic ingestors, and 70 percent of this ingestion is of floating plastic resin pellets. Seabirds in Alaska have been found to have stomachs entirely filled with indigestible plastic. Penguins on South African beaches have suffered high chick mortality from eating plastic regurgitated by the parents, and 90 percent of blue petrel chicks examined on South Africa's remote Marion Island had plastic particles in their stomachs."

We face a global problem, and for seabirds no safe places exist. For most people, the ocean provides a virtual toilet. Unfortunately, nothing flushes away; it circulates forever.

"The oceans pulsate with powerful currents, and these currents keep plastic debris in constant circulation," Watson said. "As a result, debris travels in what are called "gyres." The gyre concentrates the garbage in areas where currents meet. For example, one of the largest of these movements in the Atlantic is called the central gyre, and it moves in a clockwise circular pattern driven by the Gulf Stream. The central gyre concentrates heavily in the northern Sargasso Sea, a place that is also host to numerous spawning fish species.

"Birds, turtles, and fish mistake the tiny nodules for fish eggs. Garbage bags, plastic soda rings, and Styrofoam particles are regularly eaten by sea turtles. A floating garbage bag looks like a jellyfish to a turtle. The plastic clogs the turtles' intestines, robbing the animals of vital nutrients, and it has been the cause of untold turtle losses to starvation. All seven of the world's sea turtle species suffer mortality from both plastic ingestion and plastic entanglement. One turtle found dead off Hawaii carried over 1,000 pieces of plastic in its stomach and intestines. Another could not submerge from so much Styrofoam in its stomach."

Unending amounts of plastic pellets wash onto beaches worldwide. In New Zealand, one beach was found to contain over 100,000 pellets per square meter. Thus, it is not so farfetched to suggest that people are in fact sunbathing on plastic beaches - literally.

"I have stopped my ship in mid-ocean and found flip-flops, suntan oil bottles, plastic Coke bottles, garbage bags, and even large floating industrial plastic sheets. In each place sampled, we have also found plastic pellets," Watson said. "Once, on the bottom of the Mediterranean off France, I witnessed a scene that appalled me. The entire bottom was made of plastic. Bottles and plastic bags swaying with the tide, replacing the sea grasses and algae. It was sad to see one little fish scurry from behind a white plastic bag to take cover from me in a sunken automobile tire.

"Brushing aside another drifting white bag, I spied a flicker of red on the bottom. What I found was a plastic face staring up at me with a great big smile and two enormous plastic ears. It was the decapitated head of a Mickey Mouse doll."

What can we do to change this destruction of our natural world? We need an incentive driven, 10-20 cent deposit/return on all plastics sold anywhere in the world to ensure return. Such an economic incentive will make certain that all plastic will be returned either by the customer or an army of kids picking up plastic trash for money. Simple, easy and effective!

How can you take action:

[www.plasticrecycling.com](http://www.plasticrecycling.com);

[www.greenerchoices.org](http://www.greenerchoices.org);

[www.seashepard.org](http://www.seashepard.org);

[www.peopleinaction.com](http://www.peopleinaction.com)

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