

NEWS.scotsman.com



Site UK Web

[Search](#)

Saturday, 9th August 2008

Plastic soup swirling in Pacific 'may harbour new life forms'

Published Date: 07 August 2008

By Margaret Neighbour

SCIENTISTS are launching a study into whether the "trash vortex", a plastic soup of waste floating in the Pacific, could harbour new forms of marine life.

Environmentalists have campaigned for action to clean up the vast expanse of debris thought to cover an area twice the size of the continental United States since it was discovered in 1997.

According to the United Nations, the rubbish kills mo

ADVERTISEMENT

re than a million seabirds every year, as well as more than 100,000 marine mammals.

Syringes, cigarette lighters and toothbrushes have been found inside the stomachs of dead seabirds, which mistake them for food, as well as on Hawaiian beaches.

The rubbish vortex is held in place by swirling underwater currents. It drifts about 500 miles off the Californian coast, across the northern Pacific, past Hawaii and almost as far as Japan.

It is actually two linked areas, either side of the islands of Hawaii, known as the Western and Eastern Pacific Garbage Patches. They are connected by a thin 6,000-mile long current.

About a fifth of the junk – from footballs and kayaks to Lego blocks and carrier bags – is thrown off ships or oil rigs. The rest comes from land.

Professor David Karl, an oceanographer at the University of Hawaii, said more research was needed to establish the size and nature of the plastic soup before efforts to clean it up could be launched.

He is co-ordinating an expedition to the rubbish patch later this year and believes the vast expanse of junk actually represents a new habitat.

Page 1 of 1

- **Last Updated:** 06 August 2008 9:58 PM
- **Source:** The Scotsman
- **Location:** Edinburgh