

Reducing, Recycling, Rewilding

Oceans of Plastic

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In recent years, many young people have taken to the streets in the name of 'climate justice'. But in addition to global warming, the world is now facing another environmental threat: plastic pollution, which is literally killing our oceans.

Each year millions of marine animals die from the ingestion of plastic or are suffocated by plastic bags, nets, etc. Plastic is not biodegradable, so it stays in the water for a very, very long time. Through exposure to ultraviolet light, it then breaks down into tiny pieces. This 'microplastic' releases toxic chemicals into the environment, damaging the marine environment and even human health (through the fish we eat).

More than 40% of all plastic produced is used just once and then discarded. Much of this debris ends up in the most unlikely places ... Henderson Island is a tiny, uninhabited island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Though it is half the size of Manhattan, more than 19 tons of rubbish litter its beaches. For every square metre you walk, on average you'll find 672 bits of rubbish.

Where does all this rubbish come from? Direct dumping in rivers is one cause of the problem, but rubbish can also make its way into the oceans indirectly from land. Rainwater carries bits of plastic into local waterways, which then join larger tributaries that flow into the ocean.

FACTS & FIGURES

9 million tons of plastic end up in the ocean annually.

Plastics make up **60 to 90%** of all marine debris studied.

700 species are known to be affected by this: plastic kills over **100,000** mammals and **1 million** seabirds a year.

It takes at least **450 years** for plastic to completely biodegrade.

Only **18%** of plastic is recycled globally.

In theory, the problem of ocean plastic is not as complicated as climate change. Economist Ted Siegler notes: 'This isn't a problem where we don't know what the solution is. We know how to pick up garbage. Anyone can do it. We know how to dispose of it. We know how to recycle. It's a matter of building the necessary institutions and systems before the ocean turns into a thin soup of plastic.'

in 90 seconds

How is plastic recycled?

▶ Watch the video to find out

Glossary

(have) taken to the streets:	debris: detriti
(sono) scese in piazza	litter: inquinano
threat: minaccia	dumping: scarico
discarded: buttata via	a matter: una questione

- 1 WARM-UP** What are the advantages and disadvantages of plastic? Why is this material so important for modern life but also dangerous for the environment?
- 2 SPEAKING** Read the text 'Oceans of Plastic' and answer the questions.
 - 1 Which environmental threat has caused massive protests around the world in recent years?
 - 2 What is unusual about Henderson Island?
 - 3 How does plastic reach the ocean?
 - 4 In Siegler's opinion, can we solve the problem of plastic pollution? If so, how?
- 3 WATCHING** Watch a video about an Indian man's effort to clean up his local beach (<http://tiny.cc/f3f9qz>). Then answer the questions.
 - 1 What does Afroz say about plastic pollution in the ocean?
 - 2 How much rubbish did Afroz and his team collect from Versova Beach and how long did it take them?
 - 3 What can we do in our daily lives to help solve the problem of plastic pollution?