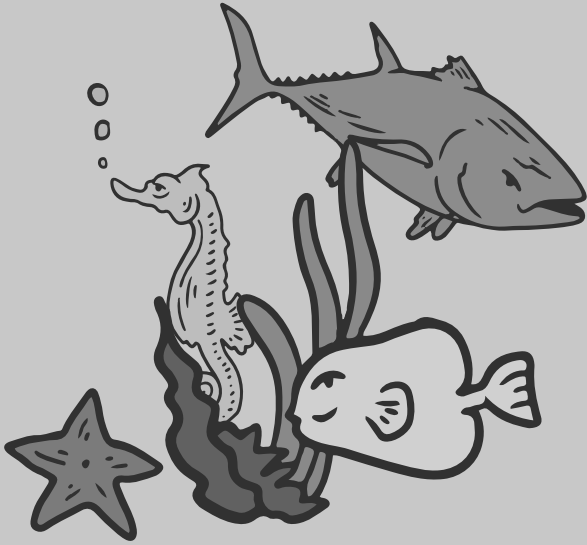


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The plastic problem



From toothbrushes to water bottles, most of us use plastic every single day. But the problem is, a lot of plastic is used once and then thrown away, ending up in rivers and oceans where it kills animals. That's why Greenpeace is working hard to tackle the problem.

Why does plastic pollution matter?

Plastic pollution is ugly to look at. But that's the least of our problems.

It makes climate change worse

Almost all plastic is made from fossil fuels like oil and gas. And plastic items – like bottles or cups – create dangerous gases that cause climate change at every stage of their life. Read the 'Climate Emergency' introduction sheet to find out more.

It harms animals and wildlife

Animals can become tangled in plastic waste, injuring or killing them. Microplastics can accidentally be eaten by animals. The microplastics contain harmful chemicals which can be poisonous to wildlife. These chemicals can enter the food chain, affecting lots more animals.

It damages humans

The UK ships lots of its plastic waste to other countries, where it can end up being dumped. The problem is that dangerous chemicals in the plastic can leak out into the environment and put people living next to the dumps at risk.



What's the problem?



Plastic is everywhere

Plastic breaks down but it doesn't disappear. It gets smaller and smaller until it turns into tiny pieces called microplastics. Microplastics end up in everything – even the food we eat and the air we breathe! This means plastic is almost impossible to get rid of.

Worse still, a lot of the plastic we throw away ends up clogging our rivers, littering the deepest parts of our oceans and getting stuck in the stomachs of animals who mistake it for food.



The recycling myth

You might think recycling is the solution. However, globally, only 9% of all plastic is recycled.

The rest is burned in incinerators (machines for burning waste material), goes into massive dumping sites or clogs up our streams, rivers and oceans.

In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, there's an area called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. It's a huge part of the sea and it's full of plastic. In fact, it's thought to be three times the size of France! We need to 'turn the tap off' and stop producing plastic altogether.



Microplastic

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What's the solution?

The simple answer is for companies to make less plastic. Here's how we're making that happen.



Deposit Return Schemes

Deposit Return Schemes are a great way to reduce plastic. People pay a little extra when they buy a drink in a plastic bottle, then when they return the empty bottle to the shop they get their money back! We're asking the government to create these schemes all over the country.



Reusable packaging

So much of the food we buy comes in pointless packaging and supermarkets have a big role to play in reducing plastic pollution. That's why we campaign to get supermarkets to stop using unnecessary packaging and offer reusable options instead.



Company commitments

Big companies like Coca Cola make far too much plastic. To stop this, we investigate and expose the amount of pollution they cause and then challenge them to do more to protect the environment.



Research

We do scientific research into the problem of plastic pollution in our rivers and waterways. We then use these findings to persuade the government and companies to take action.



What can you do?

All of us can try to use less plastic in our lives. Here are some simple ways you can.



1



2



3



Simple changes

Whilst shopping, ask yourself and your family: 'Can I buy that item without plastic packaging? Does this bunch of bananas need to be in a plastic bag? Could I put my apples straight into my basket?'

- ▶ Use a reusable bag instead of a disposable one.
- ▶ Carry a refillable water bottle.
- ▶ Avoid foods wrapped in lots of plastic.
- ▶ Ditch plastic cutlery, plates, bowls and cups for reusable ones.
- ▶ Say no to plastic straws if you don't need them.

Challenge your school

Do you think your school could do more to reduce their plastic use? Help them! Talk to your teacher about changes you want to see in school or invite a Greenpeace Speaker to come and talk about how you can reduce plastic.

Share your knowledge

Why not have a zero waste party with your family and friends? [Here's how](#). It's a fun way to show that life without plastic can be fantastic! Remember to talk to them about why it's good to reduce our plastic waste.

Reuse your rubbish

Feeling creative? Why not make something from an old plastic item. You could make a birdhouse or a pen pot from an old drinks carton. Have a look at our [guide for inspiration](#).

Invite a Greenpeace Speaker

Ask an adult to invite a Greenpeace Speaker to talk to your class or club. They'll tell you about the challenges our planet faces and what you can do to help. Find out more: www.act.gp/speakers