

THE PLASTIC PROBLEM!

Did you know that every year over **8 million tonnes of plastic** end up in our planet's beautiful blue oceans? Read on to discover the tragic effects of this life-threatening litter, and find out how YOU can help...

PLASTIC FANTASTIC?

Plastic is an amazing man-made material. It's cheap to produce and has many uses – from **pens, ping-pong balls** and **hard hats** to **prosthetic legs** and **car parts**. But *half* of the plastic we produce is designed to be used *just once* and then **chucked away** – such as **food packaging, balloons** and **straws**, much of which ends up in the **ocean**. And because plastic takes over **400 years to break down**, it stays there, causing damage, for a dangerously long time.

Not all the rubbish in the sea is dumped there on purpose. Much of it is **blown** from overflowing rubbish bins or landfill sites into rivers, streams or sewers.

TRY THIS!

Next time you're in the supermarket, take a look around. How many things **AREN'T** packaged in plastic? And how many that **ARE** really need to be?

SEALIFE STRUGGLES

Floating plastic is bad news for our friends under the waves. Turtles gobble up **plastic bags**, mistaking them for tasty **jellyfish**. Animals get trapped and tangled in **discarded fishing nets**, and birds are strangled by the **plastic six-pack rings** from drink cans. **Bottle tops** and other smaller bits of plastic are also mistaken for food and eaten by birds, leaving no room in their swollen tummies for *real* food.

GROSS GARBAGE

Because of the natural movements of the ocean currents, much of the world's rubbish ends up being swept into gigantic swirling 'patches' of plastic out at sea. The largest is the **Great Pacific Garbage Patch** in the **North Pacific Ocean** – it's estimated to be size of **Europe**. Gross! But while you're probably imagining a gigantic solid mass of floating trash, *most* of the plastic in the patch is **barely visible**. It's been broken down by the waves and sunlight into tiny particles. But this tiny **microplastic** is *just as dangerous* to animals – and can even end up harming us!

INTO THE FOOD CHAIN

Plastic doesn't break down *completely* – it just gets smaller and ends up being swallowed by fish and other marine animals and birds. The tiny particles of plastic absorb toxic industrial **chemicals** which, when eaten by fish, are absorbed into their tissues and are eventually eaten by humans.

In some parts of the **Great Pacific Garbage Patch**, there's more plastic than plankton!

GOOD NEWS?

Within one year after the UK's **5p plastic bag charge** was introduced in 2016, plastic bag use was reduced by **85%**!

Some experts predict that by 2050 there will be **more plastic** in the ocean than fish.

GOOD NEWS?

In 2017, the **UK government** announced it would ban microbeads (see right) in toothpaste and cosmetic products that 'rinse-off'. Let's hope they do!

How YOU can help!

USE LESS PLASTIC!

Fortunately, there are things you can do to help resolve the problem. Drink from **reusable water bottles**, use **multi-use shopping bags** and **recycle** all the plastic that you can to help keep waste to a minimum!

Ask your parents to choose **loose** fruit and vegetables, rather than groceries swaddled with layers of pointless plastic waste (right!).

CLEAN UP THE BEACH!

Help keep our seashores clean by going along to an organised **beach cleanup**. You'll be given gloves and litter pickers, and will set to work clearing clutter from our beaches, so it doesn't end up in the sea. It's **fun**, and we promise you'll feel really **proud** when you see your nice clean beach! Check out **mcsuk.org/beachwatch/events** to find an event near you!

NO MORE MICROBEADS!

Shockingly, loads of the products in your **bathroom cabinet** probably contain particles of plastic called **microbeads**! These minuscule plastic balls are found in **toothpastes, face washes** and even **face creams**, and, because they're so tiny, they end up getting flushed down the drain straight into the ocean!

HOW TO AVOID

Confusingly, they're not listed as **microbeads** on ingredients. Instead look out for **polyethylene, polypropylene** and **polymethylmethacrylate** – the chemical names for plastics, or the abbreviations **PET, PTFE**

Could YOUR toothpaste contain microbeads?