

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch

Just imagine a big pile of rubbish. It is strewn all over your house. Everywhere you turn, you are tripping over plastic bottles, bits of fishing nets, chemical sludge, bottle lids... and even old shoes! Sadly, this is exactly how some poor marine life have to live.

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is just that, a garbage patch, in the North Pacific Ocean. It is a collection of litter, known as marine debris that spans from the West Coast of North America to Japan. Although the actual size of the garbage patch is unknown, estimates have put it anywhere between 700 000 square kilometres, which is almost the size of New South Wales, to more than 15 000 000 square kilometres. It is difficult to get an exact measurement due to the fact that most of the debris consists of small, plastic particles that are suspended at or just below the surface, making it impossible to detect by aircraft or satellite.

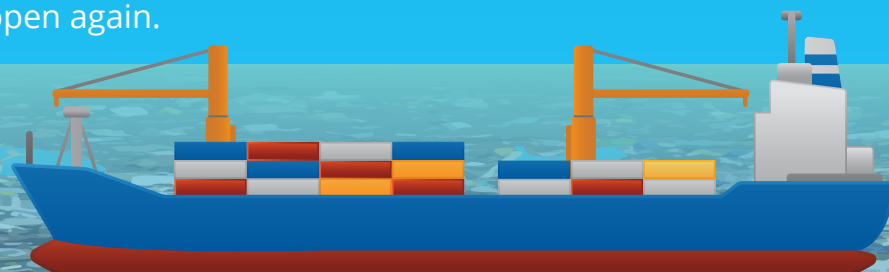
It is believed that the marine debris is formed gradually as a result of ocean or marine pollution gathered by oceanic currents. As material is captured in the currents, it is gradually moved towards the centre, trapping it in the region.

Sadly, marine birds and animals often mistake the plastic debris for food and eat it. Loggerhead sea turtles often mistake plastic bags floating in the water for sea jellies, their favourite food. The majestic animals have been found deceased and upon inspection of the contents of their stomachs, have masses of plastic in their digestive systems. Similarly, albatross mistake the plastic for fish eggs and feed them to their chicks, which die of starvation or ruptured organs.

It is not only animals that are affected by this environmental disaster. As the plastics break down through photo-degradation, they release harmful colourants and chemicals. Humans can ingest the chemicals from the plastic when eating seafood. One example of this is when toxic-containing plastic pieces are eaten by sea jellies, which are then eaten by larger fish, which in turn are eaten by humans.

With such a large scale environmental problem, many people think there is not much they can do to help. This is in fact incorrect; we can all help in our own way. We can refrain from adding to the problem by not buying water in plastic bottles and drinking tap water instead. We can also try to cut down on the amount of plastic bags that we are using. Try taking reusable cloth bags to the supermarket or consider if you even need a bag for small items at all. We can also stop the rubbish from making it to our oceans by picking up any rubbish that we see and not littering. There is often rubbish on beaches or in waterways that we can pick up and dispose of responsibly.

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is everybody's problem. We need to work together to not only find a way to clean up our oceans, but to ensure that something like this does not happen again.



Questions:

1) What does the word **strewn** mean here?

2) Why is the exact size of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch not known?

3) What impact is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch having on animals?

4) How can we, as humans, be affected by the Great Pacific Garbage Patch?

5) What does the word **refrain** mean here?

6) What changes do you think you could make in your everyday life to cut back on the amount of plastic packaging you use?

7) Does this article make you rethink the way you dispose of your rubbish? How?
