RECYCLING IS NOT ENOUGH to solve the plastics crisis

The oceans face a massive and growing threat from something we encounter every day: plastics. An estimated 17.6 billion pounds of plastic enters into the marine environment from land-based sources every year\(^1\) – roughly equivalent to dumping a garbage truck full of plastic into the oceans every minute.

Maybe you have seen the viral video of the plastic straw being painfully pulled out of a sea turtle’s nose. Maybe you have read recent reports of whales washing up dead with dozens of plastic bags in their stomachs.\(^2,3\) Maybe you have seen the photos of dead seabirds with their bodies stuffed with plastic debris. Or maybe your recent beach visit was spoiled by a string of plastic waste at the high tide line.

Plastic debris has been found floating on the sea surface, washing up on the world’s most remote coastlines,\(^4\) melting out of Arctic sea ice,\(^5\) and sitting at the deepest point of the ocean floor.\(^6\) It’s everywhere.

As plastics continue to flood into our oceans, the list of marine species affected by plastic debris expands. Tens of thousands of individual marine organisms have been observed suffering from entanglement or ingestion of plastic permeating the marine environment\(^7\) – it is impacting everything from zooplankton and fish, to sea turtles, marine mammals and seabirds.

Plastics have a profound design flaw: they are made to last forever, but sometimes are only used for a few moments. Plastic never goes away. Instead, it breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces, which act like magnets for harmful pollutants.\(^8\)
Some plastic pieces are so small that zooplankton—tiny grain-sized animals that form the base of the ocean food chain—can consume them. As those zooplankton get eaten, the potentially chemical-laden microplastics can accumulate in the bodies of ever-larger predators, making their way into the seafood we eat. Scientists are still studying how humans might be affected by the plastics that are making their way into our food, water and air.

“When your bathtub is overflowing, you don’t run for a mop before you turn off the faucet. Recycling is the mop. We need to turn off the faucet.”
– Jacqueline Savitz, Chief Policy Officer at Oceana

Recycling alone is not enough to solve the plastics crisis. To stop plastic from entering our oceans, we must reduce the amount of single-use plastic being produced at the source. We must demand that companies reduce the amount of plastic they are putting into the supply chain and find alternative ways to package and deliver their products. Without immediate changes to the way we use and abuse plastics, the total amount of plastic waste generated is expected to double by 2025.

Join Oceana and take the pledge to #BreakFreeFromPlastic

Visit Oceana.org/Plastics

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4 Lavers JL and Bond JL. (2017) Exceptional and rapid accumulation of anthropogenic debris on one of the world’s most remote and pristine islands. PNAS. 114: 6052-6055. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1619818114