



Photos courtesy of Shedd Aquarium (top), National Aquarium (middle), and Monterey Bay Aquarium (bottom).

The Aquarium Conservation Partnership (ACP)

The Volume of Plastic Pollution in Aquatic Environments

Fact Sheet

Plastic pollution in the ocean, rivers, and lakes negatively affects aquatic animals and ecosystems, and potentially even human health. Today, plastic pollution is found in almost every marine habitat on Earth – including polar sea ice and the deepest ocean trenches.¹

From 1964 to 2015, global plastic production increased twentyfold, rising from 15 million to 322 tons.² As the worldwide production of plastic has increased, so has the impact of plastic pollution in the world's ocean and freshwater systems.³

Approximately 8.8 million tons of plastic enters the ocean from land each year⁴, which equals one dump truck full of plastic per minute.⁵ This amount is expected to double by 2025.⁶ A majority of this plastic is carried by wind-driven currents into oceanic gyres,⁷ while much has also been found in remote islands.⁸

Plastic pollution in lakes and rivers can be high, or higher, than oceanic gyres⁹, and about 22 million pounds of plastic flows into the U.S. Great Lakes every year.¹⁰

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For more information

Contact Kim McIntyre,
ACP Coordinator
kmcintyre@mbayaq.org



Photo courtesy of ©Washed Ashore.

If every American chose not to use a straw for one day, we would prevent 500 million plastic straws – enough to fill 127 school buses – from entering our waterways.¹⁶

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Contact Kim McIntyre,
ACP Coordinator
kmcintyre@mbayaq.org

On average, Americans throw away over 200 pounds of plastic every year¹¹, including 100 billion plastic bags, and only about 10 percent of this plastic waste is recycled.¹² A mere 2 percent of disposable plastic plates, cutlery, and other nondurable plastic items are recycled every year.¹³

Many single-use plastic items easily wash or blow into the ocean, where they can have devastating effects on animals and ecosystems through entanglement and ingestion.¹⁴ Four of the top five items polluted on U.S. beaches are made of plastic – beverage bottles, food wrappers, bottle caps and plastic straws and stirrers.¹⁵

Reducing plastic consumption is a crucial step in keeping plastic pollution out of the ocean, rivers, and lakes. For example, if every American chose not to use a straw for one day, we would prevent 500 million plastic straws – enough to fill 127 school buses – from entering our waterways.¹⁶

By choosing alternatives to single-use plastic products and packaging, U.S. consumers can help decrease the amount of plastic pollution in our ocean, lakes, and rivers. Increased consumer demand can also help drive the creative of innovative alternatives in the marketplace.

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13 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2014.

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15 Ocean Conservancy, *International Coastal Cleanup Report*, 2017.

https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/International-Coastal-Cleanup_2017-Report.pdf

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About the ACP

The Aquarium Conservation Partnership (ACP) is a first-of-its-kind collaboration of 19 U.S. aquariums that have joined together to take collective action on science-based ocean and freshwater conservation priorities.