

PLASTIC SEAS

The planet's ecosystems are threatened on almost every front, and it is hard to assess which is the most immediate concern, or the most bona fide environmental organization. Often serious ecological concerns go unnoticed, just because they may not have the armageddon consequences of global warming or mass extinctions. The level of seaborne plastic is an example of this.

We have a "north Pacific rubbish patch" the size of Australia where currents have collected plastic into a giant eddy, beaches in the Caribbean have become plastic carpets and sea-creatures' digestive tracts are becoming choked with the material.

seaborne plastic

This video by Chris Jordan shows the chilling plight of Pacific albatrosses and other sea birds who are starving to death with bellyfuls of lighters, bottle caps and plastic flakes:

<http://www.chrisjordan.com/video/Midway%20960x720px.mov>

We are all familiar with turtles mistaking clear plastic bags for the jellyfish they feed on, and six pack yokes strangling sea birds, but the concern is even more holistic. Scientists are showing that no matter how small a filter is used there are even smaller particles of plastic that will get through it, raising concerns that the material could be blocking fish gills as well as filter feeders.

So where is all of this plastic coming from? Researchers cite littering from boats, as well as waste being carried out to sea from beaches and via rivers. Clean-ups, such as the worldwide effort in 1998 that collected 10.4 million items, can only remove a fraction of the larger objects. Over the last 5 years Vertical Blue has attempted to keep Dean's Blue Hole beach, one of the worst affected on Long Island, plastic-free, and during this time we have removed an estimated 1,500kg of plastic and other trash from a stretch of beach that is only 100 yards long.



As an indication of just how severe the situation is, in the space of a single week we found a staggering 21 toothbrushes floating in the blue hole lagoon! The type of toothbrush gives a good indication to where the trash is originating: of the 21 brushes, 20 of them were the 'straight and simple' design that these days can only really be found in 2nd/3rd world countries. The vast majority of the other types of items recovered, such as oil canisters, paint buckets, monofilament line & polyester netting, all point to fishing boats and coastal communities as being the main culprits, at least in the Caribbean. In central American countries such as Honduras and Guatemala, and probably large island nations such as the Dominican Republic and Haiti, water is often packaged in small half-liter plastic bags: fishermen tear off a corner

with their teeth and squirt the contents in their mouth before tossing the bag in the sea. This is probably the fate of almost all rubbish that is produced on these boats during fishing trips that can last from a day up to several weeks - after all why waste precious cargo space that could be substituted with profitable fish?

Even if this is the main cause, it is hard to really put too much blame on the people of these cultures, who have probably never been educated as to the durability of plastic and it's effect on the marine environment. Instead the blame should really rest on the shoulders of companies who ship vast quantities of disposable plastic products to countries that have no ecological practice for its disposal or recycling. After all you wouldn't give a gun to someone who doesn't know it is a weapon, so how can you justify shipping tonnes of plastic to countries who will inevitably

release it into the environment?

Since this is an issue that directly affects the Bahamas, and Dean's Blue Hole in particular, Vertical Blue is adopting the seaborne plastic problem as its major cause, and over the next several years we will work to increase the awareness of the situation as well as develop and implement methods to resolve it. Any ideas or information would always be appreciated.

BRAVO...BRAVO...B(bloody)ravorn
by *Sam Trubridge* on 2010-01-27 19:54:21

Good on you Will. I chased a fisherman in Italy for throwing a coke bottle over the side of his boat at sea. He was 100% unrepentant when I caught up to him. It is quite scary to imagine what percentage of the world is made up of these people...
by *fred* on 2010-01-28 16:19:33

Great article, William. Thank you for reminding us of this serious issue (and for giving us a kick in the arse to do something about it).rnrnCheers.rnrnLeern
by *Lee Eldridge* on 2010-02-04 18:32:30

Well done William and others for your actions, it takes commitment, humility and caring to clean up again and again bringing your concerns to our attention is so important. Although this problem is bigger than our local beach taking a bag to carry away rubbish opens up conversations and understandings that may encourage not using packaging, discarding it and destroying the environment and natural habitat. It is important to encourage positive attitudes to these issues - instead of an aggressive response. Although you may feel enraged by the ignorance of others actions, no one likes to be told what to do. We are all, to some extent, responsible for the mess that our seas and planet are in. TOGETHER we can create a different attitude where it is COOL TO CARE
by *Linda Trubridge* on 2010-02-10 02:53:37

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by *Linda Trubridge* on 2010-02-10 02:54:51

How hard would it be to make a bamboo toothbrush, designed to last 6 months? They give away bamboo chopsticks, and I've never seen a panda with bad teeth. The plastic generation, I find, is not very plastic (flexible) in their consumption patterns, but that's part of the industrial heritage.
by *DDeden* on 2010-02-21 12:02:43

Oh my, all that garbage there is killing our land and we are killing ourselves.
by *chi hair dryer* on 2010-04-16 10:43:53

Yes, there are bamboo toothbrushes!rnrnCheck out "The Environmental Toothbrush"
by *Silke* on 2011-09-06 21:01:41