

Plastic: Use or Waste

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By: Vanshika Khanna Plastic is like an addiction of game which one uses, can't stop using it again. There are the kind of plastics that people use be it bags, polythene, buckets, cans, glass, bowl, spoon etc. it's basically is 'the accumulation of plastic objects (e.g.: plastic bottles and much more) in the Earth's environment that adversely affects wildlife, wildlife habitat, and humans.' It also refers to the significant amount of plastic that isn't recycled and ends up in landfill or, in the developing world, thrown into unregulated dump sites. In the UK, for example, over 5 million tonnes of plastic is consumed each year — and yet only 1 quarter of it is recycled.

The three quarters that isn't recycled enters our environment, polluting our oceans and causing damage to our ecosystem. In less developed countries, most of the plastic waste eventually ends up in the ocean, meaning that marine animals are especially at risk. So much of what we consume is made of plastic (such as plastic bottles and food containers) because it's inexpensive, yet durable. However, plastic is slow to degrade (taking over 400 years or more) due to its chemical structure, which presents a huge challenge. Reducing plastic consumption and raising awareness about plastic recycling is crucial if we are to overcome the problem of plastic waste and pollution on our planet. It's unclear how long it will take for that plastic to completely biodegrade into its constituent molecules. Estimates range from 450 years to never.

Nearly 700 species, including endangered ones, are known to have been affected by it. Some are harmed visibly strangled by abandoned fishing nets or discarded six-pack rings. Many more are probably harmed invisibly. Marine species of all sizes, from zooplankton to whales, now eat microplastics, the bits smaller than one-fifth of an inch across. In many instances, sheeting and packaging plastics are disposed of after usage, however, because of their durability, such plastics are located everywhere and persistent in the environment. Plastics in electronic waste (e-waste) have become a serious global environmental and public health concern due to its large production volume and the presence of inadequate management policies in several countries.

Globally, plastic production was estimated to be 380 million tonnes in 2018. Resource helps companies who have already made ambitious plastic waste reduction commitments turn their aspirations into meaningful, measurable actions. It starts by partnering with a company to identify which changes will make the biggest cuts in the company's plastics footprint and to establish a tracking system to measure progress. Next, it helps the company implement those changes, providing expert advice along with a suite of tools and step-by-step guidance (including the publication No Plastic in Nature: A Practical Guide for Business Engagement). And because nothing multiplies impact like collaboration, Resource: Plastic connects companies, stakeholders, and governments so they can share discoveries and investments. Through strategic and innovative collaborations, some companies are also an estimated 8 million tonnes of plastic is yearly released into the ocean, leading to degradation of marine habitat which eventually affects aquatic organisms.

Long term usage and exposure of plastics and plastic products to high temperature can lead to leaching of toxic chemical constituents into food, drinks and water. Indiscriminate disposal of plastics on land and open-air burning can lead to the release of toxic chemicals into the air causing public health hazards. This paper also presents recommendations for global prevention and control of plastic wastes. Vanshika Khanna

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