

BE THE WAVE AR FRIG Y DON

Plastic Pollution

Background Information



cadwch keep
gymru'n wales
daclus tidy

**MARINE
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY**



UNDEB EWROPEAIDD
EUROPEAN UNION



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**Cronfeydd Strwythurol a
Buddosodi Ewropeaidd
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Year after year, plastic makes up most of the debris found on our beaches, both in the UK and in many other countries around the world.

It is estimated that 8 million pieces of plastic are entering the oceans every single day and having an impact on the entire ecosystem. This amount is equivalent of dumping a truckload of rubbish into the ocean every minute!

Unlike organic materials, plastic never 'disappears' in nature and accumulates in the environment. Most plastic is derived from fossil fuels and is non-biodegradable. Degradation of plastics is incredibly slow, however sunlight, salt water and waves will split larger plastics into ever-smaller pieces

Plastic makes up 80% of all marine litter from surface waters to deep-sea sediments (IUCN, 2018). (Plastic pollution data)

Plastic's robustness, low cost and flexibility means it is being used in more and more consumer and industrial products. Each year more than 300 million tonnes of plastic is manufactured, with an estimated 8,300 million tonnes of virgin plastic produced to date.

Due to the huge amount of plastic produced globally, it is essential we correctly manage the ways we produce, utilise and dispose of this modern material.

Plastic pollution can have serious impacts on the ocean and everything it supports. It can include everything plastic, large or small. Plastic bags, food wrappers, fishing equipment and tiny microplastics all influence the marine environment.

Plastic Pollution Consequences

We are becoming more aware of the impact plastic pollution has on our oceans.

There are huge consequences for hundreds of marine species due to plastic consumption, suffocation, and entanglement. Creatures including seabirds, whales, fish and turtles mistake plastic litter for food, often leading to starvation as they can't digest the plastic filling their stomach.

Seals and other marine mammals are at risk of becoming entangled in items such as abandoned fishing nets which are being discarded largely due to harsh weather and illegal fishing. These creatures often drown in these forgotten nets, a phenomenon known as ghost fishing and others may suffer from lacerations, infections, reduced ability to swim, and internal injuries.

Ocean currents can move plastics around the world. Small animals and plants can hitch a ride on the surface of plastic and travel with the currents, introducing non-native species to new areas and causing harm to that ecosystem.

Several chemicals used in the production of plastic materials are carcinogenic. Toxic contaminants can also accumulate on the surface of plastic materials that have broken up and been underwater for a long time. When marine animals ingest plastic accidentally, these toxic contaminants enter their digestive systems and could build up in the food web over time, having a direct impact on human health. Take a look at the BBC Earth Lab video for information on plastic in the food chain.

[How Much Plastic Do You Eat?](#)



Single Use Plastic

Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. Single-use bags, plastic bottles, food containers and food wrappers are the four most widespread items polluting the seas, making up almost half of the human-made waste.

Many of the single use plastic items we produce cannot be recycled. It's obvious that we need to use less plastic, move towards environmentally sustainable products and services and come up with technology that recycles plastic more efficiently.

[The Marine Conservation Society states](#) – “We must ditch our single use addiction. We cannot recycle our way out of the current plastics' crisis”.

[The Welsh Government is looking to ban a range of single use plastic items](#), many of which are hard to recycle and unfortunately are often found around the Welsh coast.

The items include plastic stemmed cotton buds, plastic cutlery, drink stirrers, straws, single use cups made of polystyrene, take away food containers made of polystyrene, plastic plates and balloon sticks. They are also looking at certain products that break down into micro fragments including carrier bags and certain plastic bottles.

The UK Government is looking at how to introduce a 'Extended Producer Responsibility' scheme which makes the producers pay for how much plastic packaging they are putting on the market. It is hoped that this will lead to less packaging overall and more recycled plastic being used rather than 'virgin plastic'.

The UK and Welsh government are jointly looking at introducing a Deposit Return scheme for all drinks containers (by 2025 if not sooner).

Details of information and consultation documents are available and the Welsh Government's commitment to reducing waste and unnecessary plastic, is outlined in the circular economy strategy, '[Beyond Recycling](#)', which aims to have a zero waste Wales by 2050.



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