

Pollution in the Mediterranean Sea

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Grade 6: 11 years

The Mediterranean Sea is one of the most beautiful seas in the world. Many people visit it every year, swim in its clear blue water, and catch fish. It is an important part of life in Malta. However, even though it looks beautiful, it is also one of the most polluted seas. According to UN Environment Programme, it has “an estimated 730 tonnes of plastic waste every day”. That means 730,000kg of waste!



*A toilet found during a clean up.
Source: original photo*

I interviewed Cristina Macelli, who is one of the organizers at Žibel, a Maltese environmental NGO founded in 2017 (<https://www.zibel.org/meet-the-team>). The organisation works to reduce waste, carry out coastal and marine cleanups, and protect nature. During cleanups, they have found some very surprising items. These include packed suitcases full of clothes and sanitary items, a set of dentures, and many vapes. The most common rubbish found around Malta includes tires, which are used as buffers between boats and walls, as



*A small boat found during a cleanup
Source: original photo*



*A volunteer bringing up a tire from the sea bed
Source: original photo*

well as plastic and fishing equipment. Some of the most polluted areas in Malta are Ta' Xbiex, Paradise Bay, and Xemxija.

According to Oceana, an international organisation dedicated to ocean conservation, *“of all the human threats to the Mediterranean, overfishing, bottom trawling and ocean plastic pollution are the most destructive. They are the worst offenders, trashing the world’s most popular sea”*.



*Plastic collected during a clean up.
Source: original photo*

[\(https://oceana.org/blog/overfishing-and-pollution-have-trashed-mediterranean/\)](https://oceana.org/blog/overfishing-and-pollution-have-trashed-mediterranean/). In fact, pollution in the sea is very harmful to marine life. Fish often mistake plastic for food. When they eat it, the plastic can build up in their stomachs and kill them. Fishing gear, such as nets, can also trap or injure animals. This is especially dangerous for turtles because they need to come up to the surface to breathe. If they get stuck in a net, they may not survive.

Dirty seas can also affect people. Visiting a place that was once clean but is now full of rubbish can be upsetting. Boat owners can face problems too, as waste in the sea can damage their propellers. Moreover, keeping the sea clean supports tourism. Many people come to Malta to enjoy the sea, so finding clean sea water helps the country to attract more tourists. Malta attracts nearly one

million tourists annually mainly for its sun, sea and leisure activities (<https://mta.com.mt/beach-management/>).

Very often, the people who take part in cleanups are volunteers. Sadly, they sometimes find injured animals and need to call professionals for help. To protect the sea, we should try to reduce the amount of plastic we make use of as well as take our own cups and containers rather than using single-use plastic items. This helps reduce waste altogether. If you see rubbish on a beach, you should tell the local council or help clean it yourself if it is safe. You can also report to NGOs like Žibel or if you are doing your own cleanup, you can use the Žibel Tribe Bins (<https://www.zibel.org/ocean-plastic-recovery-network>).



As Cristina from Žibel told me, during one cleanup day, around 1,000 kilograms of rubbish can be collected! After collection, the waste is then sorted into groups. Electronics are sent to special waste facilities because they are dangerous. Plastic is often taken to a landfill, but Žibel tries to recycle as much as possible to reduce further harm to the environment.



*The different bins to separate the collected waste
Source: original photo*

Unfortunately, the Mediterranean Sea is always facing challenges. Recently, there has been a new threat to the sea and its shores. This is because a floating tanker called the Arctic Metagaz exploded and caught fire in the Mediterranean Sea on 3rd March 2026. The damaged tanker could be very harmful to the environment if the fuel it was carrying leaks into the sea. For some time, the vessel was nearing the Maltese shores. Thankfully, this ship seems to have drifted away from our shores now but sadly it is still floating adrift in the Mediterranean Sea.



Tanker called the Arctic Metagaz

Source :

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-arctic-metagaz-explode-italy-malta-b2940942.html>

At the end of my interview, Cristina shared a message for young people in Malta. She said “It is great to see young people getting involved, helping the environment, and making the world a better place for the future. We must keep it up and do our part whenever we can”.

Sources:

- <https://www.unep.org/unepmap/resources/factsheets/pollution>
- <https://www.zibel.org/meet-the-team>
- <https://www.zibel.org/ocean-plastic-recovery-network>
- <https://oceana.org/blog/overfishing-and-pollution-have-trashed-mediterranean/>
- <https://mta.com.mt/beach-management/>