

Microplastics: The tiny destroyers of our ecosystems

By Matilda Pullicino and Nicole Young – two girls who are really concerned about our environment

Microplastics might be tiny, but they are a big problem for our planet – although they are small, they do a lot of **damage**. Microplastics are microscopic pieces of plastic that come from bigger plastic items like bottles and bags. Plastic takes a very long time to break down and, while it is breaking down, it lets out harmful and toxic chemicals. When plastic ends up in the **sea** and the **sun**, the **waves** and the **salt** make it break down faster into smaller pieces. After a while microplastics become even smaller and turn into **nano plastics**, which are less than 1 micrometre. They are so small you cannot see them **at all!**



Microplastics are **everywhere!** They can be found in the **ocean**, in **rivers**, in **soil**, in the **air** and in our **food** and **water!** In the **ocean**, **microplastics** seriously damage marine life. The animals living in the sea eat microplastics because they think it is food. So, this means that **fish**, **turtles**, **whales**, **dolphins** and **seagulls** can all eat plastic. This is extremely bad for their health because the plastic can block their stomachs and even poison them!

Since Marine animals eat plastic, there is also a bad effect on our health. For example, a fish might eat plastic thinking it is food, and then we eat the fish. That means that the plastics also ends up inside of our bodies too. Scientists have also shown that the chemicals that we eat through the microplastics can have bad effects on our hormones and scientists are still studying the effects of these microplastics on our health.

Garbage thrown away on **beaches** and **roads** are also a problem since items made of plastics can then be broken down into microplastics and washed away into our sea and we can do something to help with this problem! We must be careful when we throw things away. Make sure you throw things away properly! We can also organise or attend beach cleanups and spread information so people know about the damage we can cause by **littering!**



A very interesting piece of information is the discovery made by some scientists who are studying microplastics. A type of **bacteria** that can eat microplastics was discovered. This means that in the future such organisms can be used to break down plastics. Hopefully, this would help us clean up the pollution created by plastic.



Did you know that microplastics are also found in the clothes we wear? Some people call this fast fashion which includes clothes made of cheap material. Microplastics can be found in this cheap material. We can do our best to avoid buying fast fashion to reduce the amount of microplastics that are then thrown away into the environment. We can all do our part by thinking when we shop.

Microplastics may be super tiny but are a big **problem**. They show up everywhere, make animals sick and never **leave!** But let us all try our best to fix this mess. If we try to recycle, reuse items mindfully, use less **plastics**, join **beach clean ups** and spread the **information** we can all make a difference. Who knows maybe one of us can also become a scientist and invent a **plastic-eating robot**. Let us keep our planet clean because we do not have a **Planet B!**

Sources (text and pictures)

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