

# Factsheet 1: Plastic Pollution



(main source of information from Claire Wallerstein, Rame Peninsula Beach Care)



- Small pieces of plastic littering Britain's beaches are posing a threat to marine wildlife and getting into the food chain
- A survey by the Marine Conservation Society has found beaches are generally getting cleaner, but the amount of plastic rubbish is causing particular concern.
- A lot of plastic waste is industrial pellets which fish and seabirds can mistake for food, putting themselves at risk of being poisoned by chemicals which attach themselves to the plastic.
- Plastics account for over 50% of all litter recorded. They stay in our environment and never fully disappear.
- Turtles and cetaceans sometimes mistake plastic bags and balloons for jellyfish, and can starve when they swallow them.
- It is important to be aware of the problems facing our coasts, but also that the problems can be tackled and conservation work is slowly taking place.

## Where is the plastic coming from ? What can we do?



- **Sewage-related debris:** only the three 'p's down the loo:- pee, poo and paper. Bag it and bin it and never flush it!
- **Cargo spills - examples :** 'Lego lost at sea', the HP printer cartridges and the Vanish bottles, There is a growing ability to track such spills which has led to some instances of companies taking responsibility (e.g. HP has made a contribution to clean-up costs).
- **Shooting waste:** Plastic shotgun wadding is very common on our beaches. The Countryside Alliance Code of good shooting practice advises shooters to use paper or card (i.e biodegradable) shotgun wadding, but over half of all cartridges on sale in the country have plastic wads.
- **Fishing waste:** Many of us pick up lost fishing gear that could be reused. Instead of chucking this away, it would be good to return useful items to fishermen, especially ones we can know are passionate about the sea and fish sustainably.
- **Local plastics industry/ nurdles on beaches:** Nurdles are the small lumps of plastic that all manufacturers of plastic items start with. 'Operation Clean Sweep' (strategies to prevent nurdle loss)
- **Balloons and lanterns:** Balloon and Lantern releases have been banned from council-owned land in Cornwall since November 2015. However, this is hard to police and it's confusing if they're allowed from some places and not others. Cllr James Mustoe, who brought the motion to ban releases, is seeking a PPO (public protection order) to extend the ban to the whole county.
- **Consumer/ takeaway litter etc.:** Example:- refillable bottles produced by BeachCare are already available in Polzeath and Bude, can be ordered now by other community groups. The idea is that you get local businesses on board to refill bottles and advertise this fact. You buy the bottles from BeachCare at £3 each, then sell them for £7, and can use the proceeds to buy more bottles, making the scheme sustainable and raising public awareness about disposable plastic
- **Tourism/ hotels/ fast food waste, etc. :** Such a lot of disposable plastic is used in hotels (plastic cups, often in plastic bags, mini shampoos and shower gel bottles, plastic sauce sachets, jam/ marmalade packs, plastic water bottles, straws, etc., etc.) Might it be possible to develop a 'Code of good plastic practice' for hotels, possibly distributed via Visit Cornwall? If they sign up to it they could be accredited as a 'Marine wildlife friendly hotel'?