

# Plastics, Microplastics and Micro-Actions

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When I was a junior high school student, I joined my school's volunteer beach-cleaning activity. I remember picking up a lot of plastic. Our section of the beach became really clean, but as time went by, it changed back. The plastic never stops coming in.

Have you seen the viral video of the sea turtle with a plastic straw in its nose? At first, the straw was flexible, but it became rigid by drifting in the sea. Then, the turtle inhaled it into its nose. The video shows blood running down from it.

Scientists say that by 2050, there will be more plastic trash drifting in the sea than fish. But the most-worrying plastic may be pieces we cannot see easily—microplastics. Microplastics are pieces of plastic that are under five millimeters in size. These are pieces that break off of larger pieces due to the influence of ultraviolet rays from the sun. By eating fish which have microplastics in their bodies, these tiny pieces are dangerous for humankind as well. In fact, according to research done in 2018 on people from seven European countries and Japan, plastic was found in all of their diets. Moreover, microplastics have a chemical property that tends to absorb harmful substances in the sea, so, these substances also end up in our bodies.

Recycling seems to be the obvious solution to this environmental issue. In fact, Japan is known as a plastics recycling leader with a rate of 84%. However, 58% of this is called “thermal recovery.” Thermal recovery is the burning of plastic to generate heat for industrial purposes. This isn't really “recycling” and the proportion of plastic waste that ends up in new plastic products is actually quite small. In addition, cleaning plastic is expensive and happens a lot less than we imagine. Finally, every time plastic is reused, its quality becomes worse. Plastic products are not really made to be recycled.

Therefore, it is us who must commit ourselves to environmental action. First of all, we must reduce our need for plastic. When we want something to drink, let's try to drink something that doesn't come in a disposable bottle. When we go shopping, let's use our own bag or plastic shopping bags we already have. However, if we do use plastic, we must wash it and separate it from other garbage. We should also be active in our communities and encourage modern recycling programs. Another effective idea is using social media to persuade businesses to take action. The cosmetics' company, LUSH, did away with plastic in 60% of its products. For example, they replaced plastic shampoo bottles with bars of shampoo, similar to soap. The company got a lot of publicity, and its sales went up three times! The Nestle food company is also taking action by removing plastic straws

from its products, and all of its packaging will be made of new environmentally-friendly materials by 2025.

But, back to what we can do. When we don't properly dispose of plastic, we may think it is forgivable. "Only this time." "It's just a little bit." But in reality, our everyday actions have a great influence on the environment. It takes only one straw washed into a gutter, and then a river—and then the sea—to threaten a turtle's life.

So please think about this carefully. Our small actions—our micro-actions—can have a huge influence on the plastics and microplastics' problem. Together, we—the generation of plastic—can look harder at the world around us, and imagine new creative solutions to the use of plastic—to remove it from our seas, our sea life—and ourselves. Imagine what beach cleaning could be like in 2050. Will it be a beach paradise or a plastic hell? We must win this battle.