

# The Ocean Plastic Pollution Problem

With [skyrocketing plastic production](#), [low levels of recycling](#), and [poor waste management](#), between 4 and 12 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean each year—enough to cover every foot of coastline on the planet! And that amount is [projected to triple](#) in the next 20 years. Let that sink in for a moment.

In the ocean, [plastic pollution](#) impacts [sea turtles](#), [whales](#), [seabirds](#), [fish](#), [coral reefs](#), and countless other marine species and habitats. In fact, scientists estimate that [more than half of the world's sea turtles](#) and [nearly every seabird on Earth](#) have eaten plastic in their lifetimes.

One of the reasons that plastic pollution is such a problem is that [it doesn't go away](#): “[plastics are forever](#).” Instead, plastic debris simply breaks down into ever-smaller particles, known as [microplastics](#), whose environmental impacts are still being determined.

## Plastic Pollution Solutions: 7 Things You Can Do Today

Everyone can do something to help solve the plastic pollution problem, and millions of people worldwide are already [taking action to reduce their plastic use](#). Here are seven ways you can make a difference, starting today.

### 1. Reduce Your Use of Single-Use Plastics

Wherever you live, the easiest and most direct way that you can get started is by reducing your own use of single-use plastics. Single-use plastics include plastic bags, water bottles, straws, cups, utensils, dry cleaning bags, take-out containers, and any other plastic items that are used once and then discarded.

The best way to do this is by a) refusing any single-use plastics that you do not need (e.g. straws, plastic bags, takeout utensils, takeout containers), and b) purchasing, and carrying with you, reusable versions of those products, including [reusable grocery bags](#), [produce bags](#), [bottles](#), [utensils](#), [coffee cups](#), and [dry cleaning garment bags](#). And when you refuse single-use plastic items, help businesses by letting them know that you would like them to offer alternatives.

## 2. Support Legislation to Curb Plastic Production and Waste

As important as it is to change our individual behaviors, such changes alone are insufficient to stop ocean plastic pollution. We also need legislation that reduces plastic production, improves waste management, and makes plastic producers responsible for the waste they generate. There are a variety of ways that you can support local, national, and international legislation that provide critical solutions to reduce plastic pollution. One such effort in the United States is the 2021 [Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act](#), a comprehensive federal bill that aims to address the plastic pollution crisis, and there are a number of [state level initiatives](#) to introduce extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation that makes plastic producers and distributors responsible for their products and packaging at the end of life.

At the international level, hundreds of organizations and businesses are calling on the [United Nations to enact a global plastics treaty](#) that would set global rules and regulations that would reduce plastic pollution. And legislation that limits, taxes, or bans unnecessary single use plastic items, such as plastic bags, takeout containers, and bottles, [has been successfully enacted](#) in many places globally, and you can support the adoption of such policies in your community too. Here is a [comprehensive resource and toolkit](#) on legislative approaches to limiting plastic bags, foodware, microplastics, and more.

## 3. Recycle Properly

This should go without saying, but when you use single-use (and other) plastics that can be recycled, always be sure to recycle them. At present, [just 9% of plastic is recycled worldwide](#). Recycling helps keep plastics out of the ocean and reduces the amount of “new” plastic in circulation. If you need help finding a place to recycle plastic waste near you, [check Earth911’s recycling directory](#). It’s also important to check with your local recycling center about the types of plastic they accept.

## 4. Participate In (or Organize) a Beach or River Cleanup

Help remove plastics from the ocean and prevent them from getting there in the first place by participating in, or [organizing a cleanup](#) of your local beach or waterway. This is one of the most direct and rewarding ways to fight ocean plastic pollution. You can simply go to the beach or waterway and collect plastic waste on your own or with friends or family, or you can join a local organization’s cleanup or an international event like the [International Coastal Cleanup](#).

## 5. Avoid Products Containing Microbeads

Tiny plastic particles, called “[microbeads](#),” have become a growing source of ocean plastic pollution in recent years. Microbeads are found in some face scrubs, toothpastes, and bodywashes, and they readily enter our oceans and waterways through our sewer systems, and affect hundreds of marine species. Avoid products containing plastic microbeads by looking for “polythelene” and “polypropylene” on the

ingredient labels of your cosmetic products (find a list of [products containing microbeads here](#)).

## 6. Spread the Word

Stay informed on issues related to plastic pollution and help make others aware of the problem. Tell your friends and family about how they can be part of the solution, or host a viewing party for one of the many plastic pollution focused documentaries, like [A Plastic Ocean](#), [Garbage Island: An Ocean Full of Plastic](#), [Bag It](#), [Addicted to Plastic](#), [Plasticized](#), or [Garbage Island](#).

## 7. Support Organizations Addressing Plastic Pollution

There are many non-profit organizations working to reduce and eliminate ocean plastic pollution in a variety of different ways, including [Oceanic Society](#), [Plastic Pollution Coalition](#), [5 Gyres](#), [Algalita](#), [Plastic Soup Foundation](#), and others. These organizations rely on donations from people like you to continue their important work. Even small donations can make a big difference!

These seven ideas only scratch the surface for ways you can help address the growing problem of plastic pollution in the oceans. The important thing is that we all do something, no matter how small.

### AUTHOR

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Other websites with information about plastic pollution in the ocean and how we can help keep plastic out of the water of our planet.

[www.Earthday.org](http://www.Earthday.org)

[www.oceanconservancy.org](http://www.oceanconservancy.org)

[www.plasticoceans.org](http://www.plasticoceans.org)

[www.Greatlakes.org](http://www.Greatlakes.org) (Alliance for The Great Lakes)

[www.nationalgeographic.org](http://www.nationalgeographic.org)

[www.wwf.org](http://www.wwf.org)

And so many more!!!!