

Plastics Are Killing the Ocean's Turtles

EVERY SINGLE MARINE TURTLE ON EARTH LIKELY HAS PLASTIC IN GUT SAYS NEW STUDY

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Fishing nets have long been a scourge of the sea turtle, but all plastic is a real problem for them.
Photo: NOAA

Are you a scientist? Perhaps a materials engineer? If so, can you please figure out a material we can use for, oh, say, everything on earth, that doesn't last nearly forever,

pollute virtually all of our waterways, and end up in the gut of pretty much every single organism in the sea?

Now, I'm no scientist, but that seems easy enough.

Because plastic just ain't cutting it. Seems like every week, probably because it is, in fact, a weekly occurrence, we learn another sad, horrid fact about how badly plastic is mucking up the natural environment. From microbeads to microplastics to microthreads, that wonder product is freaking everywhere now.

We make something like 300 million tons of the petrochemical wonder every year—half of which is single use only—and dump an absurd 8 million tons of it into the sea annually. EIGHT MILLION TONS. Can you even conceive of how much that is?

The latest plastic horror show was unveiled last week.

A study published in the journal *Global Change Biology* revealed that researchers found plastic in the bellies and digestive systems of all 100 juvenile sea turtles selected in an international study. All seven species of marine turtle were represented and were picked from around the world, including the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, and the Mediterranean Sea.

Lots of nasty plastic bits like pieces of tires, fishing line, and of course, the ubiquitous microplastics were found in these poor young creatures, some of them just hatchlings, none of them full-grown adults.

These small turtles drift through the oceans, using seaweed as shelter and will eat anything that looks like food, which includes small bits of plastic.

Researchers collected the turtles, watched them in tanks for a bit, and noted they all passed plastic through their systems. Many of the turtles had consumed so much they died.

A staggering three-quarters of the plastic discovered came from single-use plastics (hey – maybe stop using that?).

As you can imagine, scientists are concerned that with apparently all marine turtles having consumed plastic, the species' continued health and survival is in question.

“It's not a question of if they have it, it's how much they have,” said Charles Manire, co-author of the study.

“The ubiquity of the presence of the particles and fibers underlines the gravity of the situation in the oceans and our need to proceed with firm and decisive action on the misuse of plastics,” senior study author Brendan Godley, professor of conservation science at the University of Exeter, told CNN.

The surf industry should be a leader here, and can hopefully find ways to eliminate single-use plastics altogether. Sex Wax moving to cardboard boxes, for example, in their wax packaging. Unfortunately, virtually every single piece of gear we use is essentially a plastic, from surfboards to wetsuits, to synthetic boardshorts.