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Fixing the Pacific Plastic Problem

All of the plastic we've ever made is still in our environment, and a startling amount of it is in our oceans. Learn what others are doing locally to eliminate plastic from their lives.

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(<http://contribute.patch.com/moderation/1380006>)



Last week, celebrated its annual Ocean's Week (<http://www.oceanshoreschool.org/>) curriculum; a school-wide educational focus on the oceans and their habitats.

The program weaves information about the oceans throughout all the subjects from art and music to science and mathematics. Driving down Highway 1, I spotted a number of classes fulfilling a community service component of the program. Students were picking up trash from . Each year when I witness this program at Ocean Shore, I am reminded of the connection between the land and sea and our responsibility as stewards of both.

More often than we realize, our actions on land have a profound impact on the marine environment. Chief among these actions is our

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STATE NEWS

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(/california/novato killed-horrific-wrong-way-crash- Three vehicles were involved. One woman was sent to the hospital with injuries.

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wide use of plastics, which find their way into the to be ingested by marine life.

With highly publicized recycling campaigns for many of our consumer plastics, it's easy to become complacent about using them. However, it's important to note that in spite of these campaigns, less than 5% of plastic is recycled. Most plastic is simply thrown away after a single use. According to Greenpeace (<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/occe-vortex/>), approximately 100 million tons of plastic is produced each year, of which 10 percent finds its way into the ocean.

Blown into the oceans from land or swept in from rivers, our plastic trash is filling the oceans at an alarming rate. At present, the contains a revolving mass of floating plastic weighing roughly 7 million tons. Referred to as the Pacific Garbage Patch or the Pacific Vortex, this mass of plastic does not biodegrade. Rather, it breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces and is deposited on our beaches in tiny particles or is ingested by wildlife. Studies have shown that at current ratios, there is roughly 6 times as much particulate plastic in the Pacific Ocean as zoo-plankton.

In addition, plastics leech hormone-disrupting chemicals into the water and the animals that ingest them, further damaging the food chain. Plastics have the potential to collect microorganisms and bacteria, thus carrying them to areas in which they would not be found naturally. This is ominous, as the introduction of non-native species can cause profound and irreparable harm to an ecosystem.

While the magnitude of the problem seems insurmountable, there is hope for a cleaner future. Locally, there are a number of heroes who have begun to make a stand for a future free from plastic.

The **Pacifica Beach Coalition** is well known throughout town for their annual and monthly beach cleanups. Coming June 3, they will be

Over The River And Through The Woods To Yosemite For Thanksgiving Or Christmas! (/california/petaluma/over-river-and-through-woods-yosemite-thanksgiving-or-christmas-0)	And there are all the holiday categories, such as toys and computers. deals-stores-ranked-discounts-
(/california/petaluma/over-river-and-through-woods-yosemite-thanksgiving-or-christmas-0)	Yosemite/Mariposa County has a slate of memorable and joyous holiday activities happening for all to enjoy!
Adam Lanza: Report Probes Dark Interior Life of The Sandy Hook Shooter (/connecticut/newtown/al-report-probes-dark-interior-life-sandy-hook-shooter-0)	The report sheds light on the shooter's infatuation with mass murder and how attempts to get him
WATCH Disney's Frozen On Ice Show Reunites Afghanistan Vet, Middletown, N.J. Family (/new-jersey/middletown-nj/watch-disneys-frozen-ice-show-reunites-afghanistan-vet-middletown-family)	Jamie Curcio, who just returned from Afghanistan, surprised his two children Friday when he jumped out of Newark
Massive Illinois Stable Fire Claims Lives of 32 Horses (/illinois/burridge/massive-illinois-stable-fire-claims-lives-32-horses)	Losses at Valley View Acres estimated at more
World's Worst Toys (/new-jersey/oceancity/2010-worst-toys-list-out)	World Against Toys Causing Harm reveals its nominees for toys that should not be in the hands of children this holiday season.

presenting the film *Bag It: Is Your Life Too Plastic?* (<http://www.bagitmovie.com/>), by director Suzan Beraza at the Sanchez Art Center. It's sure to be an educational experience and give all of us renewed purpose to eliminate the plastic in our lives.

Kyle Thiermann, a Santa Cruz native pro surfer and environmental activist, has publicized the topic with the release of his latest short movie titled *Where is Away: Solving Plastic Pollution in 4 Minutes* (<http://surfingforchange.com/>). In the movie, Kyle shares a couple of simple steps each of us can take to help solve the problem, such as using a refillable stainless steel water bottle and using reusable cloth grocery bags.

The Surfrider Foundation has a petition campaign called "Take the Plastics Pledge" (http://action.surfrider.org/t/5253/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=316) that promotes weaning yourself from dependency on plastics. In addition, they have an active campaign in Santa Cruz to ban plastic bags from distribution in local stores similar to the ban imposed recently in San Francisco. Tell your local retailers that plastic bags are harmful to the environment and the health of the planet and encourage them to adopt a paper bag policy as an alternative.

Plastic cannot simply be cleaned from our oceans since most of it is too small to be removed by anything but high-intensity trawling--a process similar to industrial shrimp harvesting, in which a large net is dragged through the water. While this would remove the plastic, it would also kill an enormous amount of wildlife in the process, exacerbating an already dire problem. The only answer to the Pacific plastics problem is education. So, it's encouraging to see the youth at Ocean Shore School out at the beach and in the classroom learning about conservation and actively involved in it.

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**Saadik Al Ahmary** • 3 years ago

Plastics and a host of other environmental problems will not be properly addressed unless and until it becomes profitable. Energime Technology (www.energime.com) provides a waste 2 energy solution that is efficient, cost effective, and highly profitable. To learn more please go to our website and or contact me direct at: saadik47@yahoo.com

[Reply](#) • [Share](#)**jennyaspen** • 3 years ago

Thank you, Ian. Something each and every one of us can do right now is change our mind frame when we step out of our homes - stop relying on being able to buy plastic bottles of beverages/water everywhere you go. Just decide you won't do it. Is it as simple as that? I think so. It's a solid start. I started using this really cool glass reusable bottle with a silicone sleeve - bkr. (mybkr.com) It's a San Francisco creation and it's the perfect size for your bag - it reminds me of a little plastic water bottle - EXCEPT it's not plastic. I don't leave home without it full. And if I forget it, well then I drink from fountains or ask for a glass of water at a cafe. Change the way you think about disposables and force yourself outside of your comfort zone. It's a step in the right direction.

**ian butler** • 4 years ago

The best way to keep plastic out of the environment is to not use it in the first place. There will be a screening of a movie called Bag It, which questions the single use plastic bag, at Mildred Owen Hall on June 3rd. My new band Thew Humpbacks will also be performing. There's more here:

<http://pacificapatch.com/even...>

[Share](#)**Bob Baldrige** • 4 years ago

There are initiatives to lessen use of plastic, change the composition of plastic, increase recycling, etc., to address the root of the problem; all of these efforts are very important but I also believe we should clean up the mess that is already exists in the ocean. Everyone seems to believe it harms the environment but nothing can be done since it would be costly and may harm wild life; but, letting it continue to accumulate and break into smaller and smaller pieces that are eaten by marine life and birds is worse for the food chain and environment than the possible damages done by clean up efforts...

Bob

[^](#) [v](#) [Reply](#) • [Share](#)**Alan Beim** • 4 years ago

Glad to read this and know that there are people who do care. I find it disheartening to walk by any place where there is both a trash can and a recycling card along with maybe a compost can and see how wrong people get it by tossing cans and bottles in the trash can and trash in the recycling can. People if we can not get this simple act right, how are we going to save our country? Thanks for letting me vent! Alan

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