

## Help Keep the Sea Plastic Free

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Survey your immediate surroundings. What materials do you see? One can bet you will find plastic, plastic and yet even more plastic. Plastic has come a long way from its first form, Parkesine, developed over 100 years ago and today, plastic can only be described as ubiquitous. It is used in a myriad of products and for a variety of uses, marketed under names such as polystyrene, PVC and nylon. It seems utterly impossible to live a plastic-free life.

Now visit a local beach and again survey your immediate surroundings. Is plastic ubiquitous enough to permeate our local beaches? The answer is undeniably yes. Two weeks ago, a two-kilometre walk along the shoreline of Sidney Spit culminated in a large haul of garbage, most of which was plastic. Among the finds: a Bic lighter, flip flop, bubble blower, bottle lids and small broken bits and pieces in a full rainbow of colours.

Take that amount of garbage collected, relative to the area it was collected in, and extrapolate how much flotsam could be littering and polluting the coastlines of the Salish Sea and rest of the world.

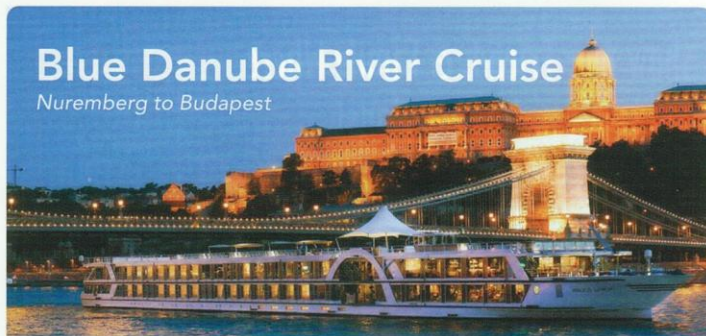
*“It is estimated that in every square kilometre of ocean, there are over 18,000 pieces of plastic.”*

How does it come to litter our beaches? It is estimated that in every square kilometre of ocean, there are over 18,000 pieces of plastic that originate from both land and marine activities. Even garbage dropped kilometres from the shore can end up in the ocean by moving through storm drains, rivers and streams. Winds and currents push the debris in all directions, leaving relatively few areas unscathed from contamination.

One notable accumulation of garbage and plastic can be found in the north Pacific Ocean and is estimated to be, at minimum, as big as the State of Texas. This area is aptly called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch or the Pacific Trash Vortex.

To some of us, the dislike of plastic in our oceans and on our beaches may simply be aesthetic, but for ocean dwelling animals it can be life and death. Two animals most commonly affected by plastic are sea turtles and pelagic sea birds. The former mistake plastic bags for a common prey item, jellyfish. These bags become lodged in their digestive tracts and the turtle dies. Seabirds, most famously the albatross, are attracted to bits of floating plastic, also seeing it as prey. They return to their nests to feed their young the catch. Chicks die from choking, blockages or from starvation, with a stomach full of bottle caps and other plastic bits. Entanglement in marine debris is yet another concern for many marine inhabitants.

While a beach ball can unexpectedly be carried away in a gust of wind, or a fishing line and lure may get accidentally snagged on the bottom and break off, most of the garbage that ends up in our oceans and on our beaches is preventable. Reduce your use of plastic bags, replacing them with reusable cloth versions. Reduce the amount of plastic you purchase by making better-informed decisions. Buy products with less packaging. Recycle as much plastic as possible. A lot of hard and soft plastics are now accepted at recycling facilities – call your local recycling provider for a complete list of items they accept and ensure all remaining items are disposed of properly. Whenever you visit a park, beach or island, remember the old adage “pack it in, pack it out” and help keep the sea plastic free.



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