

Let's start this article with a really depressing fact (just what you wanted to hear): The ocean is full of garbage. Most people have some sense of this. After all, for the last 30 years, we've been told that we need to reduce, reuse, and recycle.

EMBED: <https://youtu.be/uSM2riAEX4U>

But new studies are revealing just how much garbage is in the ocean. And it's somewhat alarming.

The recent search for Malaysian Airlines flight 370 has shown that there are massive patches of garbage floating in the ocean. These patches aren't small either. We're not talking a few pieces of debris. These are enormous, island-like patches, containing hundreds of thousands of pieces of garbage.



Scientists and researchers estimate that there are 5 primary patches, and each has between 100,000 to 1,000,000 million pieces. About [90% of that garbage is plastic](#), with over 5 trillion pieces of plastic in total floating around in the world's oceans.

As Markus Eriksen told [National Geographic](#):

This is relatively new if you think about plastic. Only since the 1950s [have] consumers [used] plastics. Now, a half-century later, we are seeing an abundant accumulation of microplastics from all single-use, throwaway plastics like bags,

bottles, bottle caps, kitchen utensils. I have pulled cigarette lighters from hundreds of bird skeletons.

As you might guess, this enormous amount of garbage takes a massive toll on the environment. Aquatic life and seabirds regularly ingest plastic, which then causes them to get sick or die. Sea turtles get soda rings caught around their necks and whales eat plastic, causing untold damage to both species.

If the pieces of garbage are large enough, they can even damage boats, with numerous reports of collisions coming in over the years.

And once things end up in the ocean, they can travel enormous distances. Markus Eriksen [told Newsweek](#) that he once found a plastic toy gorilla 500 miles off the coast of Hawaii, demonstrating the power of the ocean currents.

Of course, this raises the hugely important question: what can average people do to cut down on the amount of garbage in the ocean?

It's one thing to talk about the enormous piles of trash floating around, but it's something else altogether to do something about it. And when we talk about big, somewhat abstract issues, like the piles of refuse in the ocean, we can easily get overwhelmed. What are some practical steps that we can follow?

To help you out, we've compiled a list of 8 steps you can take to cut down on trash in the ocean. By following these steps, you can make a real, tangible difference.

#1 - Cut Down On Plastic Products



As noted above, the lion's share of the trash in the ocean is plastic. This shouldn't surprise us. Few things take longer to decompose than plastic. [Columbia University](#) notes that:

- Plastic bags can take 20 years to decompose.
- Plastic bottles can take 450 years to decompose.
- Fishing line can take an astounding 600 years to fully decompose.

It's no wonder that so much plastic is swirling around in the ocean. Every year, Americans discard around 33 million tons of plastic, and only a fraction of it gets recycled or transformed into energy. Again, to quote [Columbia University](#):

Today Americans discard about 33.6 million tons of plastic each year, but only 6.5 percent of it is recycled and 7.7 percent is combusted in waste-to-energy facilities, which create electricity or heat from garbage.

The rest ends up in landfills where it may take up to 1,000 years to decompose, and potentially leak pollutants into the soil and water. It's estimated that there are also 100 millions tons of plastic debris floating around in the oceans threatening the health and safety of marine life.

One simple solution to the ocean garbage problem is to use less plastic products and more things that easily decompose.

Check out these simple tips for using less plastic:

EMBED: <https://youtu.be/H2qKTzGdF9M>

#2 - Recycle More Materials

As noted above, a very small percent of plastics are recycled. Additionally, plastic can take hundreds of years to finally decompose, and as it decomposes, chemicals are released into the earth.

A simple solution to this problem is to recycle more. Yes, this involves a little extra work. Throwing everything away is easier and takes less thought. But the more we throw away, the more it simply piles up. Eventually this will catch up with us, either in this generation or in our children's lifetimes. We can't afford to just not think about it. Someone will have to think about this problem.

#3 - Help Clean Up The Beaches



Cleaning up the beaches is another simple way to reduce the ocean waste problem. Whether you're a surfer, fisherman, beach comber, or bird watcher, always make sure to clean up any waste you bring in.

Additionally, taking a few moments to gather extra garbage you find can make a significant difference.

Not only does this help the environment, it works for your benefit as well. The more trash that accumulates in the ocean, the more that will wash up on the beaches. Additionally, trash hurts the wildlife that makes the ocean so vibrant and enjoyable.

#4 - Be A Responsible Boater

When you boat, dispose of your waste in a responsible manner. Don't throw materials overboard and always follow appropriate regulations. If you pass floating trash, take a moment to grab it and toss it in your garbage bag.

The ocean belong to you *and* those who live in it. Do yourself and them a favor by keeping garbage out of the water.

#5 - Support Those Working To Preserve The Ocean

There are numerous organizations working to clean and preserve our oceans:

- Sea Shepherd Society
- Oceanic Preservation Society
- American Cetacean Society
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation
- And many more

By donating financially or volunteering with these organizations, you can make a tangible difference.

#6 - Purchase Fewer Things



This may touch a nerve, but simply cutting back on overall purchases can make a difference in the amount of trash generated. The more you own, the more things break and need to be thrown away. Things that are thrown away often make their way to the ocean.

Living a more minimalist lifestyle can help you focus on the things that truly matter and make you more cognizant of your overall environmental impact.

EMBED: <https://youtu.be/kiDLRiOHxq4>

#7 - Choose To Reuse More Materials

Purchasing disposable items is quick and easy, but it creates a massive amount of waste. Rather than opting for quick and easy, consider:

- Carrying a water bottle instead of disposable plastic bottles
- Using cloth shopping bags instead of plastic
- Storing things in reusable containers instead of Ziploc bags
- Purchasing larger, single bags of food instead of snack sized

Yes, you may be slowed down a bit. You will have to think more carefully about what you purchase. But the results are exponential. If every person reused more materials, the amount of garbage generated could be significantly cut down.

#8 - Buy Recycled Materials

Always look for packaging that has been recycled. Purchase food cartons that contain the small recycled symbol on them, and then recycle them again afterwards. This promotes a positive cycle of recycling and reducing the overall waste levels.

Conclusion

Yes, there is a lot of garbage in the ocean. It is a significant problem that needs to be addressed. But the solution must start with those who are actually creating the problem: us.

It's not a particularly complicated problem. By reducing the overall amount of trash being dumped into the ocean, we can promote the health and vitality of our bodies of water.

But the simple reality is that we *have to take action*. These actions don't need to be earth shattering. You don't to volunteer for Greenpeace to make a legitimate difference. By adopting some or all of the steps above, you can start making a difference today.

Barack Obama said:

This is the moment when we must come together to save this planet. Let us resolve that we will not leave our children a world where the oceans rise and famine spreads and terrible storms devastate our lands.

We agree. Thank you Mr. Obama.

This article originally appeared here at <https://moboxmarine.com/blog/how-to-help-clean-ocean/> and has been reproduced with permission.