

End Plastic Pollution

Our Planet

Our planet is incredibly important to us and, as it is the only one we have, we must ensure we look after it and care for everything in it. There are many national and international initiatives aimed at raising awareness for the protection of our planet including Earth Days, Environment Days and Recycling Weeks. These projects all aim to tell people the importance of looking after the earth and how we can do our bit to protect it. They work with local councils, schools, supermarkets and other organisations to help increase people's understanding of environmental issues and to spread the word of what everyone can or should be doing to help address these issues. Over the past few years, people have begun to realise the impact that plastics have on the environment and how it is seriously damaging our earth and the things living in it. These initiatives and organisations have been looking at plastic pollution and what can be done about it. Even the Government is working with national agencies to help combat this global problem.



What Is Plastic Pollution?

The biggest problem with unwanted plastic is the **pollution** and damage it causes to the environment.

Because plastic is cheap and easy to make, humans buy and use a lot of it, which they then dispose of. But, plastic is strong and **durable** because it was made to last, so when it is thrown away it takes hundreds of years to **decompose**. It breaks into tiny pieces, which then get blown around by the wind and the rain and lots of the plastic ends up in our streams, rivers and the ocean.



The amount of plastic on the planet is increasing **exponentially**, meaning it is threatening the environment through poisoning and injuring **marine** life and littering beaches and landscapes. The making of plastic, as well as the **incineration** of it when it is thrown away, releases toxic chemicals into the air, land and water. These chemicals can make both humans and animals ill. Because plastic does not **decompose** quickly (if at all), it fills up **landfills** and spreads out into the environment.

Did You Know...?

In the UK, a new plastic bottle tax, of up to 22p, will aim to reduce the number of plastic bottles that people throw away. This money will be returned to people if they return their bottles to the shop they bought them from.

What Can You Do to 'End Plastic Pollution'?

There are lots of things we can all do to help end plastic pollution. Most importantly, we need to remember the three Rs in order: reduce, reuse, recycle. We should first try to 'reduce' our use of plastics, then 'reuse' where possible. The last resort is to 'recycle' as this still has a negative impact on the environment, due to the initial manufacturing of the plastic.

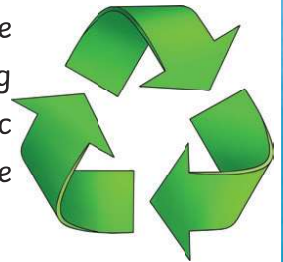
Reduce: Avoid **single-use** plastics, such as straws and takeaway cups, instead choosing to use alternatives, such as bamboo. Avoid buying plastic toys unless they are second-hand. You can't do this alone, so it is important to talk to your family, headteacher or school council about how your school and family can use less plastic.



Reuse: If you have plastic items, ensure that you use them multiple times. For example, refill and reuse water bottles and lunch bags. Also avoid using plastic bags for shopping, using strong, long-lasting fabric bags instead. When you no longer enjoy a toy, make sure you take it to a charity shop so that someone else can enjoy it.



Recycle: Check for the recycling symbol before you buy plastic and make sure that you always recycle plastic when you can, instead of throwing it away with the normal rubbish. Currently, less than half of all plastic bottles bought in the UK are recycled, however, the new plastic bottle return scheme should hopefully increase this amount.



Glossary

decompose: Rot away.

durable: Hard-wearing.

exponentially: More and more rapidly.

incineration: The destruction of something by burning.

journalists: A person who writes for newspapers or magazines or broadcasts news.

landfill: An area filled with waste.

marine: Relating to, or found in, the sea.

pollution: Something harmful or poisonous within the environment.

single-use: Designed to be used only once.

Questions

1. Which of these are problems caused by plastic? Tick **two**.

- poisoning and injuring sea animals
- taking hundreds of years to decompose
- a new plastic bottle tax
- filling landfills and spreading into the environment

2. Draw a line to match the activity with its name.

Ensure that you do not throw plastic items away, putting them in the correct bin so they can be remade into something else.

reduce

Avoid buying anything made of plastic; choose alternatives instead.

reuse

Utilise plastic items that you own more than once.

recycle

3. Name 2 awareness initiatives that help promote environmental issues.

4. Fill in the missing words from this sentence:

It breaks into _____, which then get blown around by the wind and the rain, and lots of the plastic ends up in our _____ and the _____.

5. Find and copy a phrase from the text which shows that this is **not a problem which you can solve on your own**.

6. Why is 'recycling' the last of the three Rs?

Questions

7. Do you think that the new plastic bottle tax will help the problem of plastic pollution? Explain your answer.

8. How do local councils, supermarkets and the Government help to combat environmental issues?

9. Do you think the awareness days can help? Explain your answer.
