



## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

# Plastic Pollution at Sea Reaches Worrying Level

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A report on hundreds of research studies says plastic pollution at sea is reaching worrying levels. The report warned that pollution will continue to grow even if immediate action is taken to stop such waste from reaching the world's oceans.

The report, by Germany's Alfred Wegener Institute, examined almost 2,600 research studies on plastic pollution.

"We find it in the deepest ocean **trenches**, at the sea surface and in Arctic sea ice," said biologist Melanie Bergmann. She is one of the report's writers.

Some areas, such as the Mediterranean, East China and Yellow Seas, already contain dangerous levels of plastic. Other bodies of water risk becoming increasingly polluted in the future, the report found.

The writers reported that almost every kind of ocean animal has been affected by plastic pollution. That pollution is harming important environmental systems such as coral reefs and mangroves.

As plastic breaks down into smaller pieces, it is eaten by many different sea creatures, from whales to turtles to extremely small plankton.

Bergmann said getting that plastic out of the water again is nearly impossible. She added that policymakers should center their efforts on preventing any more pollution from entering the oceans.

Some of the studies showed that even if this were to happen today, the amount of microplastic in the seas would keep increasing for years to come, she said.

Matthew MacLeod is a professor of environmental science at Stockholm University. He was not involved in the report. He said it appeared to be a good examination of existing studies on the effects of plastic pollution.

“The part that can be argued about is whether there is enough evidence to warrant aggressive action that will certainly **disrupt** current **practices** for plastic production, use and **disposal**,” he said.

MacLeod was involved in a separate study that also found that immediate measures are required because of the possible worldwide effects.

Heike Vesper is with the World Wildlife Fund, the environmental group that ordered the Wegener Institute study. She said people can help reduce plastic pollution by changing their behavior. But she added that governments must help in dealing with the problem.

“What we need is a good policy **framework**,” Vesper said. “It’s a global problem and it needs global solutions.”

The United Nations Environment Assembly is expected to meet and discuss the plastic pollution problem later this month.

I’m Jonathan Evans.

*Jonathan Evans adapted this story for Learning English based on a report from the Associated Press.*

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## Words in This Story

**trench** – n. a long, narrow hole in the ocean floor

**disrupt** – v. to cause something to be unable to continue in the normal way; to interrupt the normal progress or activity of something

**practice** – n. the usual way of doing something

**disposal** – n. the act of throwing something away

**framework** – n. the basic structure of something : a set of ideas or facts that provide support for something

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