

# Protecting the environment is our responsibility

The world's oceans – their temperature, chemistry, currents and life – drive global systems that make the Earth habitable for humankind.

Rainwater, drinking water, weather, climate, coastlines, a big proportion of our food, and even the oxygen in the air we breathe, are all ultimately products provided and regulated by the sea. Throughout history, oceans and seas have been vital conduits for trade and transportation.

Marine pollution is reaching worryingly, extreme levels, with over 17 million metric tons clogging the ocean, a figure set to double or triple by 2040. Plastic is the most harmful type of ocean pollution.

It is worth noting that the impacts of plastic pollution aren't equally around the world. Wealthier countries produce more plastic waste, which frequently flows into less developed countries. These countries, due to a lack of government support or funds, are the least capable of managing the environmental, health, social and cultural burden of plastic pollution. That means women, children, waste workers, coastal communities, Indigenous Peoples and people who depend on the sea and ocean, feel the impacts of plastic pollution more intensely.

While recycling can significantly contribute to reducing plastic waste, the worldwide recycling rate is currently less than 10%.



**“Careful management  
of this essential global  
resource is a key feature  
of a sustainable future”**

## Facts & Figures

- Oceans cover 3/4 of the Earth's surface, contain 97% of the Earth's water, and represent 99% of the living space on the planet by volume.
- Oceans:
  - Produce at least 50% of the planet's oxygen.
  - Absorb about 30% of carbon dioxide produced by humans, buffering the impacts of global warming.
  - Serve as the world's largest source of protein, with more than 3 billion people depending on them.
- Marine fisheries directly or indirectly employ over 200 million people.
- More than 400 million tonnes of plastic is produced every year worldwide, half of which is designed to be used only once. Of that, less than 10% is recycled. An estimated 19-23 million tonnes end up in lakes, rivers and seas annually.
- Around the world, 1 million plastic bottles are purchased every minute, while up to 5 trillion plastic bags are used worldwide every year.
- Plastics are the largest, most harmful and most persistent fraction of marine litter, accounting for at least 85% of total marine waste.
- Without urgent action, the 11 million tons of plastic that currently enter the ocean each year will triple in the next 20 years. This is equivalent to 50 kilograms of plastic per meter of coastline worldwide.
- It is estimated that there are as many as 51 trillion microplastic particles in the seas, 500 times more than stars in our galaxy.
- At least 137.000 cigarette butts are thrown every second in the ocean, which is equal to 3.340 packs of cigarettes. Nearly 40% of them end up in the Mediterranean Sea, mainly because of the sea currents.

## Things to do

### Reduce single-use plastics

Choose reusable products such as bags, bottles, glasses & food containers & limit the use of plastic wrap. Plastic bags that end up in the sea can be fatal for sea turtles, dolphins or sharks, as they may confuse them with jellyfish.

### Reduce waste, reuse & recycle

Most of the waste we produce on land ends up in the oceans. In this way, the need for new plastics is reduced, saving raw materials & energy.

### Participate in clean-up actions

Participate in beach & river cleanups in my area. Rivers serve as direct pathways of plastic waste to the ocean. This is the most immediate and effective way to tackle marine plastic pollution.

### Avoid products that contain microplastics

Microplastics have become an increasing source of ocean pollution in recent years, as they enter the human food chain through the consumption of animal and plant-based foods. Due to their accumulation in cells and tissues, health risks such as gastrointestinal disorders, immune system problems, respiratory problems, cancer, infertility and chromosomal alterations can occur. Microplastics are found in some cosmetics and easily enter oceans and waterways through sewage systems affecting hundreds of marine species.

### Choose to live more sustainable

Invest in sustainable, marine-friendly products, reusable coffee mugs, water bottles and food wrappers. Travel travel sustainable. Shop sustainable by choosing food without plastic packaging, using reusable bags and containers and buying local products.