

“IS PLASTIC KILLING THE EARTH?”

Do you like swimming on beaches around the world? But do you know what really happens to our oceans? Our oceans are facing one of the biggest threats in human history, where trillions of pieces of plastic are choking the very lifeblood of the Earth. This is what we call plastic pollution, which occurs when plastic items and particles like plastic bottles, bags, and microbeads accumulate in the environment and negatively impact people, wildlife, and their habitat. Humans, animals, and aquatic life are being impacted by plastic pollution. It is spreading like an incurable disease. Moreover, the environment most at risk from plastic pollution is probably our ocean. Plastic has no bounds once it enters the water. Then, the waves and storms can take it to the deepest oceanic depths, where it can build up into massive gyres on the high seas or get entangled in shorelines and fragile coastal ecosystems. Plastic is very harmful to marine life because plastic gradually decomposes into particles smaller than a grain of sand after being at the sea for a few months or years and being beaten by waves and storms. On the other side, marine life is affected in a variety of ways, from entanglement, injury to ingestion, and toxic contamination because of the smell/scent of the plastics, which might make them think that it is a fish egg or a jellyfish, and this causes the death of more than 100,000 marine life. Because of this, recovering plastics from the ocean is very challenging, if not possible.

Thousands of seabirds and sea turtles, seals, and other marine life are killed each year after ingesting plastic. It was said that plastic interfere with hormone production, which means that the bird or other animal can look completely normal on the outside but not actually be able to reproduce and grow correctly. Over 200 different marine species have been found to ingest plastic. Additionally, how can we even begin to clean up the overwhelming amount of plastic in our oceans? Reports say that the amount of plastic we use and throw away is growing year on year, and some small-scale actions that can help our oceans are beach cleans, boat trawls, and driving projects. These small-scale actions are still a big help to our oceans. These build momentum and motivation, propelling them toward our goals and aspirations, which is sustainable development for us and the next generations. The majority of plastic that contaminates our oceans comes from land. In fact, it is believed that 80% of ocean plastic pollution starts here. Also, shipping, fishing, and mismanaged plastic waste that is merely thrown into the oceans without being cleaned up, recycled, or burned. Our landfill sites are the most common way of disposing of our trash, and all over the globe landfills are employed. But due to growth in population, more and more trash is being collected, and landfills cannot accommodate it all. These results in some trash that went to the oceans. Furthermore, addressing this issue can be done through developing sustainable alternatives, reducing plastic usage, recycling plastic waste, implementing laws and regulations, and discussing plastic pollution globally. Discussing plastic pollution is important to reduce its environmental impacts and be able to create concrete solutions where we can all benefit and live in a clean and beautiful world, which is Earth.

In my estimation, YES! plastic is killing the Earth even I might not be able to feel its impact, but there are a lot, such as lung disease, cancer, cognitive impairment, death, and many more. Imagine swimming into a beach full of waste, or what if Boracay isn't as clean as what we see today. We all love to travel, but it's very frustrating when you get to a natural habitat that was full of waste. So, we must begin the action on ourselves and volunteer to help in our communities. Personally, my family and I were using plastic toothbrushes to brush our teeth every day, but when



my mother saw a bamboo toothbrush while strolling around town, she brought one for herself. When she used that for about 2 weeks, she brought back another 3 pieces. So, we changed our plastic toothbrush that we've used ever since to an eco-friendly bamboo toothbrush. This is good for the teeth because, according to our dentist, it contains antimicrobial agents that help inhibit the growth of bacteria on the toothbrush bristles, and it is gentle on the gums, especially for people like me, whose gums bleed when brushing.

To end, the Philippines is among the worst countries in the world for marine plastic pollution, with 0.28 to 0.75 million tons of plastic entering the ocean annually from Manila Bay's coastal areas. Every year, the nation utilizes over 60 billion sachets (GAIA, March 2020). To prevent it as soon as possible, we must adopt reusable items in our daily lives, like using beeswax wrappers rather than plastic wrappers in covering the foods, handbags rather than plastic bags, travel cutlery rather than plastic spoons and forks, and glass or steel containers rather than plastic Tupperware. Including communities to perform the 5 R's of zero-waste management (refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, and recycle), host a community awareness campaign about single-use plastic bags, have a monthly clean-up drive, and have partnerships with others to call on local businesses to take positive action in order to combat plastic pollution.

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