

## We're all talking about plastic...

Many people will have heard a lot of talk about plastic pollution in the news recently and how serious the effects are becoming to our planet. As a waste and recycling management company (with a passionate recycling ethos!), we felt we'd like to share some important information and key facts on the subject...

Plastic was first invented in 1907 however it is mainly the plastics that have been produced during the last 60-70 years that are causing the problem. Nowadays it's everywhere. We come into contact with it all the time and most of us probably haven't given it a second thought until now.

Much of the plastic we come into contact with and a major part of the plastic crisis, are 'single use' items that we will throw away after their first use! Common examples are bottles, food packaging, cutlery, cotton buds, straws and nappies.

- Approximately 1,000,000 drink bottles are bought every minute –that's 20,000 every second! Less than half of these are collected for recycling and just 7% get turned into new bottles.



**Items such as these can take up to 450 years to biodegrade and whilst plastic will get infinitely smaller, it will never ever, fully disappear.**

### Microbeads ban

A less obvious form of plastic is microbeads. Tiny pieces of plastic found in 'wash off' cosmetics such as toothpaste and body scrub. They go down our sinks and end up in rivers and oceans causing harm to marine life. Fortunately a ban has been put into place this year in the UK meaning that by June 2018 companies will no longer be able to produce these types of products containing microbeads.

### The Figures

- In 2015 approximately **6.3 billion** tonnes of plastic waste was generated with only 9% of this being recycled, 12% being incinerated and a whopping 79% going to landfills or our natural environment.
- At the end of last year an estimated **8.3 billion** tonnes of virgin plastic was produced.
- If we don't reduce the production of plastic or change the way it is managed then by 2050 a massive **12 billion** tonnes will end up in landfill and our natural environment.

## Plastic in the Ocean

About **10 million** tonnes of plastic waste ends up in our oceans every year. There is now so much plastic contamination that some parts have been referred to as 'plastic soup'. The effect of this on marine life is devastating. The two biggest problems are **entanglement** and **ingestion**.

- **Entanglement** – marine creatures and fish can become tangled up in plastic items such as bags and fishing lines causing them to be unable to move freely. This can make catching food difficult and in some cases be fatal.
- **Ingestion** - many marine creatures can't distinguish between pieces of floating plastic debris and food. Turtles mistake plastic bags for jelly fish which are part of their diet. This causes damage to their digestive systems, malnutrition and starvation, often leading to death.



## Micro-plastics

Once plastic has slowly degraded it eventually turns into 'micro-plastics'. These are tiny plastic particles, 5mm in diameter or less and they get ingested and inhaled without any notice.

- A third of the line caught fish in the UK was found to contain plastic fragments.
- Worryingly, plastic has also been found in other foods such as honey, sugar, water (both bottled and tap) and beer!

Micro-plastics are an increasing concern for scientists and in 2016 the European Food Safety Authority stated there was an increased risk to human health and safety. Although the extent of the harm caused to humans is still unknown, plastic is potentially a major source of toxic chemicals to the body.

## What Can We Do?

The production of plastic needs dramatically reducing and other alternatives need to be found to make a big enough impact on the plastic problem we are facing. It is largely the governments and corporations responsibility to take action on this. However we can all start making personal changes now to help reduce plastic pollution:

- **Buy a reusable bottle and coffee cup** – this will also end up saving you some money too! Coffee shops are usually happy to make your coffee in your own cup and sometimes will give a discount!
- **Say NO to straws and plastic cutlery** – whilst it may be convenient, they are not usually a necessity.

- **Think about food packaging** – Buy cardboard packaged products where possible e.g. washing detergent that comes as a powder in a cardboard box. Rather than pre-packaged fruit and veg, buy it loose (it's often cheaper this way too!)
- **Carry a shopping bag with you** – since the charge on plastic bags there is already an 85% drop in their use. Let's keep it rising!
- **Make use of Tupperware and containers at home** – swap items such as food bags and cling film with reusable containers. Buy food in bulk and portion it out. Use the packaging from items such as margarine and sauces in glass jars to store things in once their contents are empty!
- **Recycle!** – this may seem like an obvious one but it's actually quite surprising how many people would still sooner throw their yoghurt pot in the waste bin rather than taking a minute to wash it out and pop it in with the recycling!

At Haulaway all the waste we collect comes back to our Waste Transfer Station where it is manually sorted by our team of 'pickers', working on the picking line. This enables us to pull out and save as much plastic as possible to be baled up and sent away within the UK for reuse. Soft plastics such as films can be remade into films, and hard plastics might be used by car manufacturers to make items such as dashboards.