

# Plastic Fantastic?

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## INTRODUCTION

Trashing plastic garbage in nature can have quite serious consequences for nature and the animals in it. There is a lot of plastic waste in the oceans, and much of it washes up on the shore. Plastic has had a significant negative impact on the sea animals, as well as the animals on land.

- How does plastic affect the animal life in the arctic?
- What can we, as individuals, do to better the situation?

## BACKGROUND

Alexander Parkes was the first man to set a patent on plastic, in 1856. However, it was not widely used until the 1900's. People were not aware of the negative effects of throwing plastic waste in nature, and it is still like this. In Tromsø we can find traces of plastic from the entire globe. The sea currents of the world reaches Tromsø, bringing the plastic waste to our doorstep.

Today plastic makes up a large proportion of the waste in Tromsø. Throughout the decades we have used the ocean as a large dustbin. That is because 2/3 of the planet consists of water. The result of this has led to huge problems on a global basis, for both humans and animals. The only ones to blame, are ourselves.

## PLASTIC AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Every year we dump more than 25 million tons of waste in the oceans. It takes a very long time to degrade, and gathers up where the oceans meet. This can create large islands of plastic, some of which are on the size of California.

Some types of plastic use over 400 years to break down. Plastic degrades to small particles floating around in the ocean. Plankton, the first players in the food chain filtrate the nutrients from the water and take up plastic. The plastic then accumulates in the food chain. The plastic can contain poisons such as Polychlorinated biphenyl, commonly known as PCB. If consumed, it may disturb fertility. PCB is found in old plastic molecules, and is a worldwide problem today, because of the long degradation time of plastics.

When the oceans freeze, some plastic particles get caught in the ice. They will stay there until the ice melts. New research shows that 1 trillion plastic particles can be released within the next decades if the ice continues to melt in the same pace as now.



<http://www.oceanvoyagesinstitute.org/seabirds-study-shows-plastic-pollution-reaching-surprising-levels/Contents-of-a-dead-northern-fulmars-belly>



Photograph: Caroline Curtis/Direktoratet for naturforvaltning.  
Plastic piercing a grey seals skin

## ANIMAL LIFE

Many complications occur for the animals who misinterpret plastic items for their food. In fact, the average northern fulmar has about 0.6 grams of plastic in their belly. One million of the fulmars die each year because of plastic. Seals can be trapped in plastic from an early age, and as they grow, the plastic remains the same size. The result of this is that their bodies grow around the plastic item, adapting to the form, and it often pierces into their skin.

## CONCLUSION

Plastic can affect the animal life in the Arctic in many different ways. If consumed, the plastic in the animal stomach can interfere with the animal ability to reproduce, the fertility rate can slow, and the animal grows according to the plastic around or inside of it. This will cause it to have serious pains, or even die. There are many ways humans can stop this from happening. Recycle right, be conservative and be observant of the nature around you.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oQeXhURtgY>  
Bo Eide - Plankton munching particles

## REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Remiks collects about 270 tons of plastic from households in Tromsø, annually. Furthermore they collect about 500 tons from the private sector. Reuse, reduce, and recycle, throw garbage in the correct recycling bags, and be more conservative when it comes to using plastic.

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