

# RUBBISH AND THE OCEAN

We have allowed rubbish and other pollutants to get into our oceans. This directly affects the health of the ocean and the well-being of the animals that live in it.

Each year more than seven billion tonnes of rubbish makes its way into the sea. Marine debris may be dumped or blown off ships and stationary platforms at sea, but 80% of rubbish found in oceans comes from land. On its journey to the ocean, it kills, maims and injures wildlife and pollutes the ecosystems that they depend on for food, shelter, and to raise their young. Thousands of animals become trapped in or choke on the rubbish that we throw away.

## How long does it take for items to break down in the marine environment?

Fruit — 2 weeks	Cigarette Butt — 10 years
Paper towel — 2-4 weeks	Styrofoam cup — 50 years
Newspaper — 3 weeks	Plastic bag — 100-400 years
Cotton cloth — 1-5 months	6 pack rings — 400 years
Cardboard box — 2 months	Plastic bottles — 450 years
Milk carton — 3 months	Glass bottles — 300 years
Tin can — 1-3 years	Aluminium can — 200-500 years
Natural fibre rope — 14 months	Monofilament fishing net — 600 years

*\*Source: Ocean Conservancy, 2006*

## PLASTIC

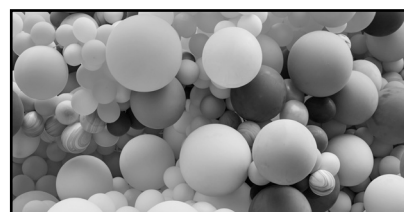
Plastic is especially bad, as it takes such a long time to break down and is also mistaken for food by many animals such as whales or turtles. One turtle was found with 224 pieces of plastic in their stomach. Plastics sit in a solid knot in the stomach, causing digestive problems. Often, these animals can no longer feed and starve to death.

## Alternatives to plastic

- Glass, stainless steel, wood and ceramic containers.
- Steel or glass drink bottles
- Bring your own bags — cotton or hemp bags can be used thousands of times.

## Everyday objects that can become hazards to animals and ways you can help

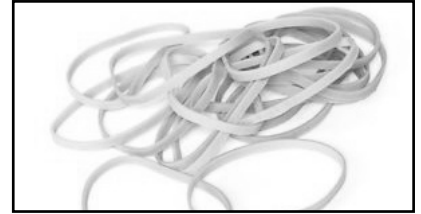
- **Balloons**  
Once balloons burst, animals can mistake them for food and can choke on them.
  - Cut used balloons into pieces before putting in the bin.
  - Avoid balloon releases as the balloons can land anywhere.
- **Containers and cans**  
Attracted by leftovers, animals will often forage inside cans and get their heads trapped. Larger animals may get their tongues caught or damaged by sharp edges. Animals such as cats, foxes, gulls, rats and dogs often rummage in rubbish bins.
  - Clean cans and containers, drop lids inside cans and pinch cans shut.
  - Cut containers in half.
  - Recycle where possible.



- **Elastic bands**

These get caught around necks of small animals and beaks of birds. They can also be swallowed, causing an animal to choke.

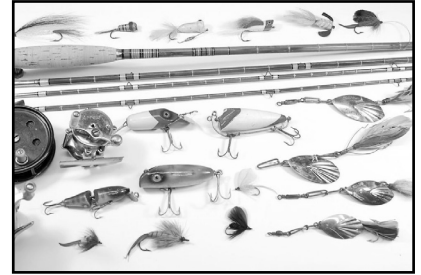
- Whenever possible reuse bands.
- Cut them open before putting in a bin.



- **Fishing tackle**

Fishing line can get caught around legs, wings, necks and beaks, and hooks can pierce skin and muscle or be swallowed causing internal injuries.

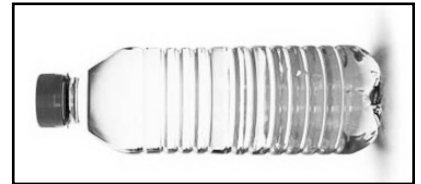
- Take unwanted line home and cut it into small pieces before putting it in a bin.
- Wrap hooks in newspaper before putting in a bin.



- **Bottles and jars**

These break easily, leaving sharp pieces that can cause serious injury. Animals can get trapped in glass jars.

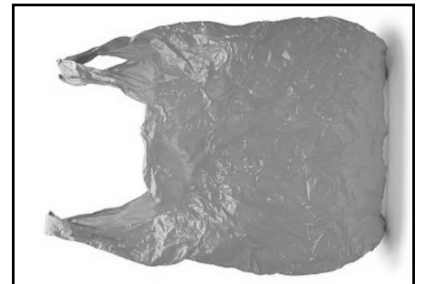
- Clean and recycle glass bottles and jars.



- **Plastic bags**

Animals can climb inside plastic bags and suffocate, or eat them and choke. Each bag takes hundreds of years to decompose and does not break down once eaten so can kill more than one animal.

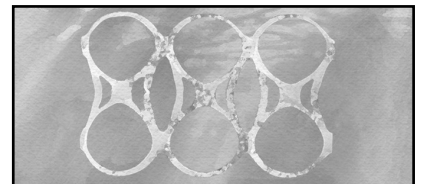
- Choose reusable bags.
- Tie a knot in all plastic bags before disposing of them.
- Reuse or recycle your plastic bag.



- **Plastic can holders**

Animals can get entangled in these. These plastic holders can cause deep sores, wounds and choking.

- Buy drinks in recyclable or cardboard packs.
- Cut up plastic can holders before recycling them.



## What you can do to help

1. Recycle, reuse and reduce rubbish where you can.
2. Always take your rubbish home and put it in a bin.
3. Look at the products your family uses. Is there a lot of extra packaging that is not needed? Tell the manufacturer by letter, phone or e-mail. Most Companies have offices set up to handle your concerns.
4. Buy from companies who are reducing unnecessary packaging.
5. Remove tin can tops completely.
6. Squash aluminium cans before taking them to a collection point. This takes up less space, and makes it harder for animals to get stuck inside them.
7. Teach others about protecting animals from litter by reducing, reusing, and recycling.