

Drastic Plastic and Solutions for Less Pollution

Each year, about 300 million tons of plastic are consumed worldwide and the plastic pollution made affects at least 700 marine species. According to a Plymouth University study, at least 100 million marine mammal species are killed each year from plastic pollution. Every piece of plastic that has ever been made still exists because plastic is not made of materials that can decompose. When plastic is burned, it breaks down into microscopic, toxic particles.

When a plastic bottle is not thrown in a recycling bin or simply tossed on the streets, it might find its way into a storm drain and eventually out to sea. The sun's UV radiation makes the plastic brittle and it breaks up into smaller pieces from the friction of waves. Pieces of plastic and plastic bags may have the appearance of food a marine animal would usually eat and an animal could potentially mistake it for food. When marine animals ingest the plastics, they can't digest it properly and their bodies become clogged with garbage and toxic materials.

As an island chain, Hawaii must protect the sea creatures that inhabit the waters around it. Ocean pollution is a major problem in Hawaii and the litter on beaches has increased by 77% since 1994. On the Big Island, Kamilo Beach is a victim of plastic litter and garbage. NOAA's Marine Debris Program has a map that shows several "garbage patches" where ocean currents push large concentrations trash and debris. The garbage from these major patches in the ocean wash up on beaches across our island chain, but mostly end up on Kamilo Beach because it is the head of the chain. Marine debris is a problem all around the world, but if we don't start taking major action

now, species like Hawaiian monk seals and green sea turtles could become seriously endangered. The Hawaiian monk seals have declining a population and all eight species of sea turtles are endangered.

Recycling and litter prevention is necessary because we don't want our island to be covered in garbage 50 years from now and we don't want to be wading through miles of plastic on our beaches. Ocean pollution is deadly to all marine life and could be the factor that kills off an entire species. Plastic pollution rates are only increasing, despite some efforts to help prevent it. Children in Hawaii walk on today's streets and beaches littered with garbage and have come to accept that this is what Hawaii will always look like. Younger and future generations will grow up seeing trash on the ground and won't think anything of it because the streets or beaches have always been scattered with litter.

Clarence T.C. Ching deeply cared about the community and did non-profit work because he believed that the grateful response from the community and the happiness of the people was a reward itself. The people of Hawaii should follow Clarence T.C. Ching's footsteps and do more work to give back to the community, even if it's a simple action like picking up a bottle cap on the street. Picking up and recycling any trash around the islands reduces the chance of a marine animal from ingesting it and can inspire others around you to do the same.

To reduce the amount of plastic that gets washed out to sea, the state should put up more recycling bins and recycling centers around the islands to encourage people to recycle. Having more recycling bins around the island also gives people the option to

recycle because in some areas recycling bins are not available and people will instead toss their plastics into the trash can. The state could also put guards or “straining gates” over storm drains so plastics and major litter doesn’t get washed out to sea. Schools should teach children about recycling and litter prevention from an early age so they can grow up and become a cleaner generation. Schools could also have huge service projects where they send grades out to clean beaches or streets and have a competition to see which grade can collect the most litter!

Even though Hawaii seems small compared to the rest of the world, we can still make a difference. The slightest change is still a change and can even spark a chain reaction across the United States and then the world! No matter how big a problem may seem, it can always be solved through hard work and dedication. Plastic pollution in the water and litter around the island won’t disappear overnight, but over a long period of time, results can be amazing if we all pitch in. Hawaii can help reduce the amount of plastic pollution in the ocean by recycling and residents can pick up after themselves and others if they see trash lying around. The marine life in Hawaii’s waters can have a lower chance of being caught in plastic waste and a lower chance of having punctured intestines or organs if we take the initiative and start working toward a cleaner, safer, more beautiful Hawaii.