

# Plastic: A Threat to Hawaii Life

by Sarah Montoni

Hawaii is a beautiful place but every year we see millions of tons of plastic enter our ocean. Let's face it: plastic pollution is a big problem. If we don't act now, there could be more plastic than fish in the waters within the next ten years.

Ocean pollution affects the health of wildlife, people and local economies. Toxic chemicals leak out of plastic and enter into the food chain making water undrinkable for humans and killing wildlife. Over a 100 million marine animals are killed each year due to plastic debris in the ocean. We are already facing the problem with the "Great Pacific garbage patch", located between California and Hawaii.

We should act now before it's too late. In 50 years, the collection of plastic in the waters will be so extensive that it'll be impossible to resolve.

Plastic pollution will create toxic algae bloom (1) making the water harmful to environment and human health. We know that water is an important natural resource used for drinking and other purposes in our lives. 80% of infections and diseases come from water, too. So, even swimming in our beautiful ocean may cause diseases like gastroenteritis and skin and kidney problems. It may also cause damage to plants and animal nutrition (2).

Water pollutants are killing sea weeds, mollusks, marine birds, fishes, crustaceans and other sea organisms that are food for humans. All of this will be affecting the social and economic well being of the Hawaiian community that depend on fish for living, meaning less catch and income. The dying of the wildlife and unsafe swimming in the Hawaiian waters will lead to less tourism meaning less money and jobs for the community's needs.

Obviously, the problem will extend even to river mouths and estuaries making water undrinkable. Here we go again: more health problems for humans and animals.

Solutions for the problem are being offered, already, by Hawaii State with the banning of plastic bags, other unsafe products and beach clean ups. But, in my opinion, we, as a community, need to make the biggest effort. First of all, people need to be educated regarding this big issue. Obviously, there are a million solutions for it but each single person needs to use common sense to help. If you are walking on our beautiful community (beaches, school grounds, sidewalks) pick up and dispose any trash you see. It doesn't cost anything and makes you feel better.

Use reusable bags for all your shopping. This way we'll reduce plastic that harms our marine life. Every year, sea turtles, whales and seabirds fill their bellies with plastic, mistaking it for real food.

A good idea is the use of "The Inner Harbor Water Wheel" already in use in Baltimore, Maryland (3). It is a water-wheel vessel that removes trash from the harbor and is powered by water and solar power. The goal of it is to keep the water clean from waste. We could use this invention on our shores.

With the trash we collect we could run a yearly competition of art created with waste materials. All the money from the sale can go to an organization that cleans up beaches and saves marine life or to a workforce created specifically to keep our community clean. This way we create new jobs and depend less on a shortage of volunteers. Also, you encourage people to be creative and do good for Hawaii's future. Another idea can be making benches or playgrounds from all our recycled materials. It may become something you may use everyday and enjoy.

Even industries should help using biodegradable materials and smaller formats with less plastic. For example, when you open a big bag of snacks, it is only half filled. So why not make it smaller and biodegradable? Hawaii's businesses should start the idea by replacing plastic materials (styrofoam food

containers, plastic wrap, plastic forks, etc.) with biodegradable materials so if it makes it to the ocean, it will just dissolve.

Clarence T.C. Ching cared about the Hawaiian community's happiness and safety. As part of this beautiful community, we should follow his footsteps being aware of the problem we are facing and give back as much as possible. Let's try to be more involved in beach clean ups, clean up after ourselves, volunteer more, don't leave trash anywhere after picnics or get together. Be more responsible!

Acting now will make sure we can still swim in our ocean, have drinkable water, a lot of wildlife to enjoy in our hikes or snorkels and still keep our food chain alive. Also, we will save a lot of jobs, tourism and keep Hawaii's economy high. Hawaii is a small grain in a big pile of sand but if we start caring for our community and environment, others will follow.

#### Resources

- (1) [www.noaa.gov/resource-collections/ocean-pollution](http://www.noaa.gov/resource-collections/ocean-pollution)
- (2) [www.alliedacademies.org](http://www.alliedacademies.org)
- (3) [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)