

THE GREAT PACIFIC GARBAGE PATCH

What is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch?

Floating just under the surface of the water between the California coast and Hawaii is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. This is a huge accumulation of plastics and other waste that has been pushed by the sea's currents into one enormous mass. Estimates of its size vary. Some scientists believe it is twice the size of Texas, while others claim it may be twice the size of the continental United States! It is like a chunky soup, slowly swirling around in the water, decaying and releasing chemicals into the ocean. As you might guess, this is not beneficial to the wildlife there. It is also not good for us.

Where did it come from?

All of the trash in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch came from human beings. It is comprised of things that washed down storm drains, dropped into rivers, or were dumped into the ocean. Most of the waste in the patch has been broken into tiny pieces, but there are things as large as refrigerators floating around out there.

What can we do to lessen the problem?

No one knows how to clean up the patch, but we do know how to prevent it from getting bigger. Clearly, people need to do a better job disposing of waste. First, make sure that all of your trash gets thrown away in the proper receptacles. Litter can eventually find its way to the ocean. Next, make sure that you are following the Three Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle. The less material that goes into the waste stream to begin with, the less chance that it can find its way into the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

