End Plastic Pollution

Our Planet

Our planet is incredibly important to us and, as it is the only one we have, we must ensure we look after it and care for everything in it. There are many national and international initiatives aimed at raising awareness for the protection of our planet including Earth Days, Environment Days and Recycling Weeks. These projects all aim to tell people the importance of looking after the earth and how we can do our bit to protect it. They work with local councils, schools, supermarkets and other organisations to help increase people's understanding of environmental issues and to spread the word of what everyone can or should be doing to help address these issues. Over the past few years, people's understanding of plastics has increased due to the work of these groups. People have begun to realise the impact that plastics have on the environment and how it is seriously damaging our earth and the things living in it. These initiatives and organisations have been looking the impact of and ways to prevent plastic pollution. Even the Government is working with national agencies to help combat this global problem.

What Is Plastic Pollution?

The biggest problem with unwanted plastic is the pollution and damage it causes to the environment. Because plastic is cheap and easy to make, humans buy and use a lot of it, which they then throw away. But, plastic is strong and durable (hard-wearing) because it was made to last. When it is disposed of, it takes hundreds of years to decompose (rot away), first breaking into tiny pieces (micro-plastics), which get blown around by the wind and the rain, ending up in our waterways (streams, rivers and the ocean).

The amount of plastic on the planet is increasing exponentially (more and more rapidly), meaning it is threatening our planet through poisoning and injuring marine life and littering beaches and landscapes. The making of plastic, as well as the incineration (burning) of it when it is disposed of rather than recycled, releases toxic chemicals into the air, land and water. These chemicals can make both humans and animals ill. Because plastic does not decompose, it fills up landfills and spreads out into the environment.

What Can You Do to 'End Plastic Pollution'?

To help End Plastic Pollution we need to remember the three Rs in order: reduce, reuse, recycle. We should first try to 'reduce' our use of plastics to lessen the amount in the world, then 'reuse' existing plastic products where possible. The last resort is to 'recycle' as this still has a negative impact on the environment, due to the initial manufacturing of the plastic.

Reduce: Avoid single-use plastics (designed to be used only once), such as straws and takeaway cups, instead choosing to use alternatives, such as bamboo. Avoid buying plastic toys unless they are second-hand. You can't do this alone, so it is important to talk to your family, head teacher or school council about how your school and family can use less plastic. There are many alternatives available for your school, such as wooden rulers and clipboards, bins and baskets made from natural materials and refillable dry-erase pens.

Reuse: If you have plastic items, ensure that you use them multiple times. For example, refill and reuse water bottles and lunch bags. Also avoid using plastic bags for shopping, using strong, long-lasting fabric bags instead. When you no longer enjoy a toy, make sure you take it to a charity shop so that someone else can enjoy it. Also encourage your school to use glass, china crockery and metal cutlery, rather than plastic cups, dishes and cutlery.

Recycle: Check for the recycling symbol before you buy plastic and make sure that you always recycle plastic when you can, instead of throwing it away with the normal rubbish. Currently, less than half of all plastic bottles bought in the UK are recycled, however, the new plastic bottle return scheme should hopefully increase this amount.

Did You Know...?

In the UK, a new plastic bottle tax, of up to 22p, will aim to reduce the number of plastic bottles that people throw away. This money will be returned to people if they return their bottles to the shop they bought them from.