



Ensuring we will have more fish than plastic in the ocean

International conventions expressly prohibit the discharge of plastic into the sea, but plastic can still find its way into our oceans from careless handling on the vessel or mismanagement downstream and onshore.

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Introduction

Up to 13 million tonnes of plastic waste reaches ocean waters every year. According to the [UN Development Program](#) , that is equivalent to dumping the contents of one garbage truck into the ocean every minute. A whopping 89% of all litter found on the ocean floor are single use items like plastic bags. Plastic persists in the ocean for hundreds of years and poses grave risks to sea creatures. If we continue dumping items such as plastic bottles, bags and cups after a single use into the ocean, by 2050 oceans will carry more plastic mass than fish.

Plastic is one of the categories of garbage which MARPOL Annex V expressly prohibits from discharging into the sea, but it could find its way there from careless handling on the vessel or mismanagement downstream and onshore. So, what can ship operators and crews do to prevent garbage, especially plastics finding their way to the ocean?

Reduction at source – the solution?

Shipowners and managers should consider the products being procured in terms of the garbage they will generate. In other words there needs to be a reduction at source and this in turn would result in lesser amounts for crew and ultimately the shore facilities to manage and process. Vessels' garbage management plans do discuss waste minimization, but very few organizations actually go ahead and act upon it since acting on waste minimisation strategies is not an explicit obligation under MARPOL, although IMO does provide guidance on waste minimisation in [Resolution MEPC.295\(71\)](#)

Recommendations

Plastics in the ocean is a global problem. Change requires action from all of us, irrespective of which industry we belong to.

The commitment to reduce plastic waste will need to come from the top in the organisation as this is not a matter that can be handled by a single department within a company or the vessel alone. Owners/managers will need to establish policies addressing this topic. A first step is to investigate how much plastic garbage their vessels generate and which type of operations are contributing the most. Feedback from crew will be needed and should be welcomed. Finally, there needs to be a dialogue with the suppliers of ship stores, particularly with respect to plastic packaging.

When considering reduction at source, the starting focus must be single use items such as cutlery, plates, straws, cups, bottles, bags as well as plastic packaging. Single use plastic is a majority of the material that is polluting our oceans and harming wildlife.

Some options to consider are:

- using supplies that come in reusable or recyclable packaging and containers;
- using supplies that come in bulk packaging, taking into account factors such as adequate shelf-life (once a container is opened) to avoid increasing garbage associated with the products;
- Taking care to manage any plastic once on board including educating crew to the effect of plastic waste on sea creatures should litter accidentally escape the vessel.

Gard publications

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- [**Kuwait joins India in ban on single-use plastic onboard ships**](#)
- [**Be an Ocean Steward and reduce the plastic waste reaching our seas**](#)
- [**Plastics in the Ocean – Why we should all be concerned**](#)
- [**Seas of plastic: The Ocean Cleanup**](#)
- [**Does beach cleaning make a dent in the plastic pollution problem?**](#)
- [**MARPOL Annex V – the international convention banning the discharge of plastic and garbage from ships**](#)
- [IMO's 2017 Guidelines for the Implementation of Marpol Annex V](#)

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