



Be an Ocean Steward and reduce the plastic waste reaching our seas

Plastic persists in the ocean and causes damage to wildlife. Although legislation was first introduced in 1988 to prevent pollution by garbage from ships the issue of plastic waste in our oceans is unfortunately still very much with us.

Published 02 September 2024

Written by Kim Jefferies

The legislation

The MARPOL regulations as first drafted in 1973 and amended in 1978 address marine pollution. Annex V regulates handling of garbage from ships. Garbage includes all kinds of food, domestic and operational waste, all plastics, cargo residues, incinerator ashes, cooking oil, fishing gear, and animal carcasses generated during the normal operation of the ship and intended to be disposed of continuously or periodically. The regulations for the prevention of pollution by garbage from ships entered into force internationally in 1988. Today, more than 150 countries are signatories to MARPOL Annex V.

MARPOL Annex V applies to all ships, which means all vessels of any type whatsoever operating in the marine environment. Under MARPOL there are several “Special Areas” defined where the restrictions are stricter. Currently, there are eight Special Areas designated under Annex V: the Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Red Sea, the "Gulfs" areas, the North Sea, the Wider Caribbean region including the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, and the Antarctic area. The dumping convention supplements the MARPOL regulations in covering discharges from ships in international waters. Land side, MARPOL requires ports to provide appropriate reception facilities for waste including plastic.

Under MARPOL Annex V plastic is **strictly banned** from disposal at sea and all vessels are obliged to deposit such garbage at reception facilities ashore. Logs must be kept of garbage disposal and penalties are, in many countries, severe for breach of these regulations. Breach of regulations also includes failure to accurately log garbage management. In the United States, individuals and companies may be criminally prosecuted for falsification of garbage logs to hide unlawful discharge of plastic waste whether or not the discharge took place in US territorial waters. Penalties in the United States can be severe including incarceration.

Prevent plastics reaching the ocean

Plastic persists in the ocean and causes damage to wildlife. Seafarers should take care to avoid accidental loss of plastic items overboard and shipowners and managers can assist by reviewing their procurement practices and reducing plastic packaging coming onboard the ship. We can all assist by pushing for best practices on the shore side for adequate reception facilities. The “*Consolidated guidance for port reception facility providers and users*” ([MEPC.1/Circ.834/Rev.1](#)) is intended to be a practical users’ guide for vessels’ crew who seek to deliver MARPOL residues/wastes ashore and provides a basis for establishing best practice procedures. To support the establishment of adequate reception facilities world-wide, Members and clients should encourage their Masters to report any inadequacies for port reception facilities in accordance with the procedures set out in Appendix 1 of the circular

If you would like to learn more about some of the issues we have talked about, the IMO has a webpage on [Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships](#).

You can also find out more in our articles on [MARPOL compliance and distances ‘from the nearest land](#), [From trash to treasure: The Ocean Cleanup story continues](#) and [Think global, act local](#)

Be an Ocean steward and do your part to reduce plastic waste reaching our seas!