

Top Ten Facts about Plastic Bags in our Oceans

- 1) Americans use more than 100 billion plastic bags each year, more than 300 bags per person per year.
- 2) Plastic bags are used for an average of 12 minutes, but a single plastic bag has a life expectancy of up to 1,000 years.
- 3) During the 2011 International Coastal Cleanup, volunteers collected 120,450 pounds of bags in the United States. In Massachusetts alone, CLEANSWEEP volunteers collected 5,712 pounds of plastic bags, one of the most common forms of litter found.
- 4) In the ocean, plastics break down into small, plankton-sized particles that can outnumber plankton six to one. These pieces collect toxins like PCBs and DDT at levels up to 1,000,000 times the levels found in seawater.
- 5) Marine wildlife often mistake plastic bags for food, especially sea turtles hunting jellyfish. In fact, high amounts of plastic material, especially plastic bags, have been found blocking the breathing passages and stomachs of many marine species, including whales, dolphins, seals, puffins, and turtles.
- 6) In the middle of the Atlantic, there is an area that spans the distance between Virginia to Cuba called the Great Atlantic Garbage Patch: a soup of plastic with up to 26 million plastic particles per square kilometer.
- 7) 85 percent of all sea turtles will be injured or killed by plastics in their lifetimes, including the endangered leatherback turtles that summer in Massachusetts Bay before migrating to the tropics to mate.
- 8) 80 percent of marine debris comes from land-based waste, and the most direct route to the Great Atlantic Garbage patch is from the east coast of the US.
- 9) Retail businesses spend more than \$4 billion per year to provide plastic bags.
- 10) Nearly 100 cities, towns, and counties across the US have banned plastic bags, half of them in the past year.

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