

Your coffee cup lid is likely to outlive you and your grandchildren

Globally, 8-million tonnes of plastics are dumped into the sea every year, according to WWF South Africa. That's the equivalent of a full truck-load of rubbish being dumped into the ocean every minute!



Image source: www.pexels.com

While plastic has many valuable uses, we have become over-reliant on single-use or disposable plastic which has severe consequences for the environment, in particular our oceans and our health. This is why World Environment Day 2018 has been themed #BeatPlasticPollution and is calling for strong consumer and government action.

Ecological consequences

John Duncan, head of WWF-SA's Marine Programme, comments: "We have spent centuries extracting and consuming the planet's resources and then simply discarding what is left over into the ocean or landfills. Not too surprisingly, our natural ecosystems are now reaching the point where they can no longer absorb our waste and we are starting to witness natural feedback cycles in the form of climate change, species extinctions and oceans increasingly teeming with more plastic than fish in volume."

Duncan points out that while many people think that recycling is the answer, this is something of a misnomer.

"Although South Africa has a growing recycling sector, the reality is that due to poor economic returns or the non-recyclability of a number of types of plastics, a large percentage of the plastic that you use will never be recycled, even if you put it in your recycling bin. A better place for you to start is perhaps to take a minute to think about whether we need some of the problem plastics to start with," he points out.



There's more to the plastic pollution crisis than just carrier bags

Dr Nonhlanhla Kalabaila 5 Jun 2018



Single-use plastics

“Plastic items such as straws, coffee cup lids, earbuds, individual sweet wrappers, plastic cutlery, stirrers and shopping bags are generally used for less than 20 minutes before they are thrown away. As it is highly unlikely that they will be recycled, they are likely to outlive you and your grandchildren by a couple of hundred years. The next time you are offered one of these items, take a second to think about whether you really need it, or if you can find another way of consuming your drink or carrying your coffee and shopping.”

Plastics by numbers

- Out of the top 20 offenders, South Africa is the 11th worst offender in the world when it comes to releasing plastic waste into the sea (higher than India and Brazil).
- 94% of all beach litter in South Africa is made from plastic, of which 77% is packaging.
- The amount of litter washing up daily in Table Bay tripled between 1994 to 2011, far outstripping the growth in Cape Town's population over the same period.
- An estimated 1-million plastic bottles are bought around the world every minute.
- 100,000 marine animals killed by plastics each year.
- 50% of consumer plastics are single use.

Sources: University of Cape Town's Fitzpatrick Institute, United Nations, Science

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