

## Plastic Consumption causing World Indigestion

Plastic is a widely used material in our day to day lives. It is convenient, available, light weight, relatively cheap and durable. Its durability makes it ideal for use because it resists corrosion but it is its durability that is an environmental concern. Statistical information (<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/feb/22/plastics-recycling-trash-chemicals-styrofoam-packaging>) shows that in fact only 14% of the disposed plastics are recycled. The remaining 86% finish in the environment. Plastic is not biodegradable and once produced it cannot be naturally destroyed. For this reason, when plastic is disposed of, it disrupts habitats and harms wildlife especially if ingested. Harmful chemicals released from plastics are toxic to the soil and to growing crops. Moreover, it also releases toxins into groundwater, which is an invaluable resource.



***Photographs of plastic waste in the seas around the Maltese Islands (Photos taken in Birgu)***

## **Recycling of Plastic in Malta**

In Malta families are encouraged to recycle clean glass, metal, paper and plastic objects. Wasteserv is responsible for the home collection of recyclable waste where on a fixed number of days recyclable material is collected and taken to the Sant' Antnin recycling plant in Marsascalea. At this plant recyclable waste may be used to provide renewable energy, for compost or exported. Recent statistics, the results of which have been published in local newspapers. (<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20171127/local/malta-has-poorest-eu-recycling-rate-and-its-getting-worse.664185>) show that the amount of recyclable waste in Malta is the lowest in the European Union. In fact, there has been a DECREASE of 10% in the amount of waste recycled by Maltese families since 2012. To encourage people to recycle their plastic waste, there are various initiatives around the Maltese islands. One such initiative is the *Crush and Win* activity organised by GreenPak where people who crush and place their labelled plastic bottles for recycling have the opportunity of winning a €100 prize in cash. (<https://lovinmalta.com/sponsored/sponsored-announcement/you-can-win-100-every-day-by-simply-taking-out-your-trash>)

## **The proposal of the Incinerator**

Landfills around the Maltese islands are fast reaching their maximum capacity. For this reason, the building of a new incinerator is being taken into consideration. This incinerator will be finished by 2023 and its aim is to reduce the amount of disposed waste by 40% (<http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-02-28/local-news/Waste-incinerator-planned-to-be-built-in-Maghtab-by-2023-will-address-40-per-cent-of-waste-6736185440>). Among other materials to be incinerated, plastic is one of the materials. The problem with burning plastics is that toxins harmful to living organisms are released into the atmosphere. ([http://www.wecf.eu/cms/download/2004-2005/homeburning\\_plastics.p](http://www.wecf.eu/cms/download/2004-2005/homeburning_plastics.p))

## **Initiatives within our School**

Our school community is very aware of the universal problem caused by plastic. Sponsored by the Litterless Campaign, big water dispensers were bought and students were encouraged to fill re-usable water bottles rather than buy new plastic bottles each time. The re-filling of water bottles was also being done at less cost than buying a new 500ml water bottle.

Results show that whereas before the initiative was launched, an average of 150 plastic bottles was being sold to students per week, this amount was reduced by 50% after the initiative was launched. The Eko-Skola committee is still working to encourage ALL students within the community to have their own re-usable water bottles and the final aim is to have no plastic water bottles being sold per week. For this reason, members of the committee have thought of having re-usable water bottles on sale to encourage ALL students to have their own re-usable plastic bottle.

### **The way forward**

Various organisations, such as Greenpeace and Oceana stress that the way forward towards a more environmental friendly community is to **increase awareness**. Such awareness is heightened through **education** of the population at large. This is as quoted from a report issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) which states that “*Education is humanity’s best hope and most effective means in the quest to achieve sustainable development.*”

(<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001593/159355e.pdf>)

There is a growing body of evidence, provided for instance by the United Nations ([http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd\\_pdfs/csd19/learningcentre/presentations/May%209%20am/1%20-%20Learning\\_Centre\\_9May\\_ppt\\_Mohanty.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_pdfs/csd19/learningcentre/presentations/May%209%20am/1%20-%20Learning_Centre_9May_ppt_Mohanty.pdf)) and The Green Education Foundation (<http://www.greeneducationfoundation.org/nationalgreenweeksub.html>) which indicate that the key towards sustainable living is the **reduction of waste** rather than its recycling. Indeed, during the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, British prime minister Theresa May, has urged other world leaders to join her in her pledge towards the reduction of plastic waste by banning the use of plastic drinking straws and coffee stirrers. The Environmental Packaging Agency (EPA) also encourages cutting down on coffee cup plastic lids, cling film and plastic packaging on individual food servings.

The population at large should work as one and present a united front in its quest to tackle the problems arising due to the use of plastic; this non-biodegradable product causing great harm to the environment because it cannot be broken down and digested by our home, planet Earth.

