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## Editorial

### L.A., ban the plastic bags

**The L.A. City Council should approve a ban on the carry-out bags to protect the environment.**

May 22, 2012

The City Council on Wednesday will consider whether to ban stores in Los Angeles from offering single-use plastic carry-out bags. A ban would take some getting used to, but examples from other jurisdictions, including the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County, show that it can be done and that shoppers and stores quickly adapt. A ban is the right move. The council should adopt it.

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For a city with such a strong environmental ethic, Los Angeles is lagging on the plastic bag issue. It has been battling around the idea of a ban for three years as cities up and down the state acted to keep millions of the bags from being freely distributed, only to end up fouling waterways, beaches and the ocean.

Like the Styrofoam containers that once held fast-food hamburgers, plastic bags became popular because they seem cheap and convenient. But it turns out they seem cheap only because the true costs aren't assessed directly to the seller or the buyer, but to all of us when we bear the burden of environmental degradation and cleanup. Some fast-food chains recognized that they, their customers and our society could take a step forward by reaching back and returning to the use of paper containers. Others caught up when laws required them to. No one is the worse off for it, and we're all better off without the Styrofoam clogging streets and sewers and, eventually, forming part of a floating mid-ocean garbage patch.

Likewise, plastic bags are more costly to all of us than they appear and won't be missed once they are gone. Stores do offer an alternative — asking modern life's essential question, "Paper or plastic?" — but there are even better options. More shoppers now carry reusable totes, and for those who won't, don't or just forgot, paper bags would still be available in Los Angeles stores for a modest fee.

Isn't a plastic shopping bag ban just as foolish as the new requirement, panned on this page last week, that stores put locking wheels or other devices on shopping carts to make sure that they don't end up on city streets? Not at all. Losing carts is costly for stores, and they have a financial incentive to self-police and to round up carts that

have gone astray. There is no inducement for stores to gather up all the disposable plastic bags they send home — nor do they have the ability to do so — so they freely distribute them at little cost to themselves but at a huge cost to the environment.

Law or regulation is required when the free market and habit lead us to do things that produce hidden and unacceptable costs. That's the case with single-use plastic bags. It's time for the state's largest city to catch up and ban them.

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## Research ship finds the world's oceans are 'plasticized' - CNN.com

By Rose Hoare, for CNN

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CNN.com

(CNN) -- A marine expedition of environmentalists has confirmed the bad news it feared -- the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch" extends even further than previously known.

Organized by two non-profit groups -- the Algalita Marine Research Foundation and the 5 Gyres Institute -- the expedition is sailing from the Marshall Islands to Japan through a "synthetic soup" of plastic in the North Pacific Ocean on a 72-foot yacht called the Sea Dragon, provided by Pangaea Exploration.

The area is part of one of the ocean's five tropical gyres -- regions where bodies of water converge, with currents delivering high concentrations of plastic debris. The Sea Dragon is visiting the previously unexplored western half of the North Pacific gyre -- situated below the 35th parallel, and home to a massive expanse of plastic particles known as the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch" -- to look for plastic pollution and study its effect on marine life.

Leading the expedition is Marcus Eriksen, a former U.S. marine and Ph.D student from University of Southern California.

"We've been finding lots of micro plastics, all the size of a grain of rice or a small marble," Eriksen said via satellite phone. "We drag our nets and come up with a small handful, like confetti -- 10, 20, 30 fragments at a time. That's how it's been, every trawl we've done for the last thousand miles."

Eriksen, who has sailed through all five gyres, said this confirmed for him "that the world's oceans are 'plasticized.' Everywhere you go in the ocean, you're going to find this plastic waste."

Growing glaciers smother climate debate



First wave of tsunami debris hits U.S.



Quake, tsunami debris threaten coastlines  
Japan quake debris moving toward Hawaii

Besides documenting the existence of plastic pollution, the expedition intends to study how long it takes for communities of barnacles, crabs and molluscs to establish,

whether the plastic can serve as a raft for species to cross continents, and the prevalence of chemical pollutants.

On a second leg from Tokyo to Hawaii departing May 30, the team expect to encounter material dislodged by

the Japanese tsunami.

"We'll be looking for debris that's sub-surface: overturned boats, refrigerators, things that wind is not affecting," Eriksen said. "We'll get an idea of how much is out there, what's going on and what it's carrying with it, in terms of toxins."

Scripps Institute graduate Miriam Goldstein was chief scientist on a similar expedition to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in 2009. According to her research, there has been a 100-fold increase in plastic garbage in the last 40 years, most of it broken down into tiny crumbs to form a concentrated soup.

The particles are so small and profuse that they can't be dredged out. "You need a net with very fine mesh and then you're catching baby fish, baby squid -- everything," Goldstein says. "For every gram of plastic you're taking out, you probably take out more or less the equivalent of sea life."

Scientists are worried that the marine organisms that adapt to the plastic could displace existing species. Goldstein said this was a major concern, as organisms that grow on hard surfaces tend to monopolize already scarce food, to the detriment of other species.

"Things that can grow on the plastic are kind of weedy and low diversity -- a parallel of the things that grow on the sides of docks," she says. "We don't necessarily want an ocean stuffed with barnacles."

Sea-level rise: Impacts and mitigation measures around the world

Eriksen says the mood on the Sea Dragon has been upbeat, with crew members playing a ukulele and doing yoga, "but the sobering reality is that we're trawling through a synthetic soup."

Also on board is Valerie Lecoer, founder of a company that makes eco-friendly baby and children's products, including biodegradable beach toys made from corn, and Michael Brown from Packaging 2.0, a packaging consultancy.

Eriksen says they have been discussing the concept of "extended producer responsibility".

"As the manufacturer of any good in the world today, you really can't make your product without a plan for its entire use, because you could eventually have 7 billion customers buy your product," he said.

"If one little button has no plan, the world now has a mountain of buttons to deal with. There is no room for waste, as a concept or a place -- there's just no place to put it anymore. That's the reality we need to face. We've got this plastic everywhere."

File # 11-1531

## Report Brings to the Surface the Growing Global Problem of Marine Litter

### UNEP Head Calls for World-Wide Ban on Pointless Thin Film Plastic Bags

Washington DC/Nairobi, 8 June 2009 - From discarded fishing gear to plastic bags to cigarette butts, a growing tide of marine litter is harming oceans and beaches worldwide, says a new report.

The report, the first-ever attempt to take stock of the marine litter situation in the 12 major regional seas around the world, was launched on World Oceans Day by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and Ocean Conservancy.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said:

"Marine litter is symptomatic of a wider malaise: namely the wasteful use and persistent poor management of natural resources. The plastic bags, bottles and other debris piling up in the oceans and seas could be dramatically reduced by improved waste reduction, waste management and recycling initiatives".

"Some of the litter, like thin film single use plastic bags which choke marine life, should be banned or phased-out rapidly everywhere-there is simply zero justification for manufacturing them anymore, anywhere. Other waste can be cut by boosting public awareness, and proposing an array of economic incentives and smart market mechanisms that tip the balance in favor of recycling, reducing or re-use rather than dumping into the sea," he said.

The report's findings indicate that despite several international, regional and national efforts to reverse marine pollution, alarming quantities of rubbish thrown out to sea continue to endanger people's safety and health, entrap wildlife, damage nautical equipment and deface coastal areas around the world.

"This report is a reminder that carelessness and indifference is proving deadly for our oceans and its inhabitants," says Philippe Cousteau, CEO of EarthEcho International and Ocean Conservancy board member. "Offered here are more than mere facts and figures. The time for action is now, and true change will require taking a bold and courageous stand. There are solutions that everyone, everywhere in the world, can adopt to make a positive difference for our water planet."

#### Plastics and cigarettes top the "Top Ten" of marine debris

Plastic - especially plastic bags and PET bottles - is the most pervasive type of marine litter around the world, accounting for over 80 per cent of all rubbish collected in several of the regional seas assessed.

Plastic debris is accumulating in terrestrial and marine environments worldwide, slowly breaking down into tinier and tinier pieces that can be consumed by the smallest marine life at the base of the food web. Plastics collect toxic compounds that then can get into the bodies of organisms that eat the plastic. Global plastic production is now estimated at 225 million tons per year.

Plastics can be mistaken as food by numerous animals, including marine mammals, birds, fish and turtles. Sea turtles in particular may confuse floating plastic bags with jellyfish, one of their favorite treats.

A five-year survey of fulmars found in the North Sea region found that 95 percent of these seabirds contained plastic in their stomachs. Studies of the Northeast Atlantic plankton have found plastic in samples dating back to the 1960s, with a significant increase in abundance in time.

Smoking-related activities also receive top rankings when it comes to sources of marine litter. Cigarette filters, tobacco packets and cigar tips make up 40 per cent of all marine litter in the Mediterranean, while in Ecuador smoking-related rubbish accounted for over half of the total coastal litter 'catch' in 2005.

"The ocean is our life support system - it provides much of the oxygen we breathe, the food we eat and climate we need to survive - yet trash continues to threaten its health," said Vikki Spruill President and CEO of Ocean Conservancy. "The impact of marine debris is clear and dramatic; dead and injured wildlife, littered beaches that discourage tourism and choked ocean ecosystems. Marine debris is one of the most widespread pollution threats facing our ocean and it is completely preventable."

#### The two sides of tourism

The tourism and recreation sector has a significant impact on the state of seas and coastlines around the world:

. In some tourist areas of the Mediterranean, more than 75 per cent of the annual waste production is generated during the summer season.

. In Thailand, it is recognized that marine litter affects tourism - a high-value industry for the entire region.