



GIRL SCOUTS + SUSTAINABILITY

# Reducing Plastic Pollution



Each year, over 17 billion pounds (8 million metric tons) of plastic finds its way into our oceans and 22 million pounds of plastic enters the Great Lakes. Plastic reaches our waters from many preventable sources and can have profound impacts on local wildlife:

- On average, **every American throws away 270 pounds of plastic** each year. Since only 9% of this plastic is recycled, much of it ends up in landfills or as plastic pollution in our environment.
- In addition to direct littering, plastic comes from inland sources by moving through our local waterways, whether it was washed away from beaches, traveled by wind, or swept into storm drains from littered streets in order to reach the Great Lakes.
- Once in the environment, **plastic does not decompose** but instead continuously breaks down into smaller pieces called microplastics, eventually becoming so small we cannot see them.
- **Plastic threatens wildlife who may become entangled in or ingest it.** This can make animals sick, prevent their ability to reproduce or even lead to death.
- Plastic pollution also impacts humans—**it has been found in the fish we eat and even our drinking water.**
- In 2019, **90% of the litter removed** from Great Lakes beaches was made of plastic.

The single-use plastics we use every day for just minutes last in our waterways for centuries. Together, we can work towards solutions by **changing our habits, supporting businesses who create or use innovative alternatives, and speaking out about this issue to our communities and policymakers.** By working collectively, our actions will help prevent plastic pollution at its source, protecting our waterways and the people and wildlife that depend on them.



# Reducing Plastic Pollution

## HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Learning about plastic pollution and recognizing how much plastic we use every day is the first step in preventing plastic from reaching our waterways. Below are some other ways you can take action and encourage others to do the same.

### REFUSE SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

- Audit your plastic use and make a pledge to reduce your use of your most commonly-used single-use items
- Host a plastic-free lunch or event with your troop
- Say “no thanks” to plastic items you might not need, like utensils or straws

### RAISE YOUR VOICE

- Start a letter-writing campaign to let policy-makers know you want them to pass on plastics
- Encourage local businesses to reduce their plastic use
- Host an event to educate your community about plastic pollution and how to prevent it

### REMEMBER TO REUSE

- Create upcycled art by reusing plastic waste collected at home or at school
- Repair items so you can reuse them
- Create a prompt to help you remember your reusables as you leave your home every day

### RESTORE NATURAL AREAS

- Organize a playground, public park or beach clean-up to remove litter from natural areas
- Join Shedd for a Great Lakes Action Day by signing up at [sheddaquarium.org/glad](https://sheddaquarium.org/glad)
- Conduct a storm drain audit

## WHAT SHEDD IS DOING

At Shedd Aquarium, we’re committed to walking the talk on plastic pollution. We have worked to reduce our own operational plastic footprint in our gift shops and cafes, while continuing to raise public awareness about plastic pollution. We also partner with businesses, policymakers and other stakeholders to drive a cultural shift around plastic use and highlight their leadership on the issue.

Visit [sheddaquarium.org/reduce-plastic-pollution](https://sheddaquarium.org/reduce-plastic-pollution) for more information.