

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch – the 10 most horrifying things I think everyone should know

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A couple of weeks ago, myself and a few other MediaCommers attended Nigel Gwilliam's recap session on this year's SXSW. Nigel highlighted that one prevalent theme of the festival was how climate change continues to worsen, and that innovative solutions are sprouting up around this.

Don't be fooled, this is not a marketing innovations update, but a beautiful segue into my latest obsession. The main thing I haven't been able to stop thinking about since the SXSW update is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Since learning of it, I can't stop thinking about it. Maybe I've been living under a rock in blissful ignorance – as I've been reading more and more, I found that it's been written about for the last 10 years, but I'd never heard of it

before.

For anyone unfamiliar with the monster that is the GPGP, it is formed because between 1 – 2.41 million tonnes of plastic are entering our oceans from rivers each year. Over half of that plastic is less dense than the sea, so doesn't sink and is instead caught and transported within currents until it accumulates in a patch (or gyre, or vortex).

Here are the 10 most horrifying things I think everyone should know about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch:

1. Its 3 times the size of France (with an estimated surface area of 1.6 million square kilometres).
2. It weighs an estimated 80,000 tonnes and consists of more than 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic.
3. Because most of the garbage is plastic, which as we know is not biodegradable – it doesn't disintegrate but simply breaks into smaller and smaller pieces, called microplastics.
4. The microplastics within the Great Pacific Garbage Patch make the water look like a "cloudy soup".
5. It was only discovered in 1997.
6. The vortex's area is nearly impossible to measure, because the rubbish sits near the surface of the ocean, but denser debris can sink under the ocean's surface.
7. Because it's so far from any country's coastline, no nation will take responsibility or provide the funding to clean it up. Apparently, it would bankrupt any country who tried to clean it up.
8. Drones surveying the site discovered permanent plastic islands, some over 15 meters in length.
9. The GPGP leads to ghost fishing. Amongst the larger debris in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch are inexpensive fishing nets. Ghost fishing

happens when these discarded nets continue to catch marine life.

10. Unfortunately, this isn't the only garbage patch, it's just the biggest.

Others can be found in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, and "trash patches" are even starting to appear in smaller bodies of water like The North Sea.

The Ocean Clean Up is a non-profit organisation that are currently developing technologies to clean up the GPGP, and you can support their work [here](#) if you feel passionately about this. The fight back against the damage we are causing our natural world is very topical right now. In the UK, David Attenborough continues to raise the profile of the pollution in our oceans – for example Blue Planet II brought much attention and action against single use plastics.

I'm not here to preach – given that I only just found out about the GPGP who am I to talk; but reducing our plastic usage provides a great excuse to invest in some nice treats. In case the 10 horrifying facts about the GPGP doesn't motivate you, here's some shopping inspiration to help you along your way...

- Get a reusable bottle – [here's](#) a link to The Independent's 13 best ones.
- If you are a hostess with the mostess, invest in reusable straws – [here's](#) a link to a selection of good ones, featured in NY Mag.
- Get a reusable coffee cup – our team love a [Keep Cup](#).
- Carry cutlery with you (so you don't use disposable ones) – a snazzy portable option from Joseph Joseph Go Eat can be found [here](#).
- Treat yourself to a glass lunchbox instead of using plastic bags to keep food fresh – Ikea have a nice selection of ones – [here](#) – and these also come with Bamboo lids.

I appreciate that a grim obsession with a heap of floating plastic in the sea is likely not the desired outcome of a SXSW update, but it is important to discuss the GPGP for so many reasons. This planet is our home and our consumption choices *do* have an impact.

Awareness of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, along with all the other damage we are doing to our oceans will continue to rise, and from this we can expect changes to consumer

behaviour to be influenced as such. Thoughtful and sustainable consumption is on the rise, and as marketers we need to understand the driving motivations behind these behaviours.

Sources

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