

Kathryn Cunningham

English 2010

Mrs. Larson

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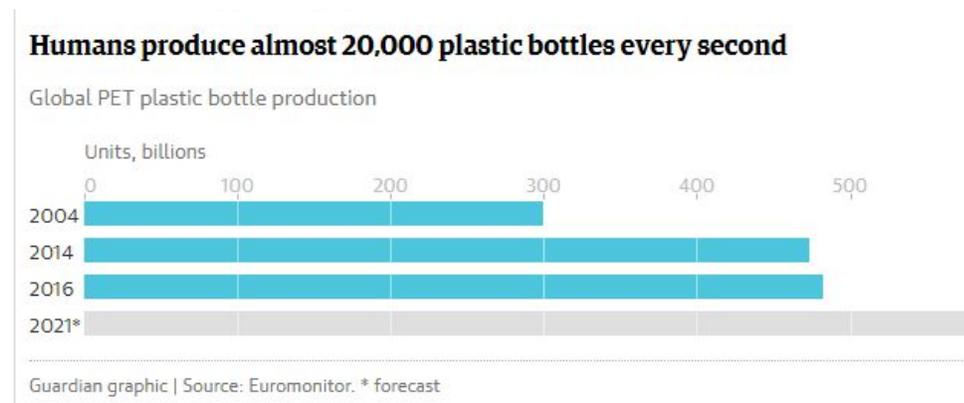
Plastic Here, There, Everywhere



6-ton sperm whale washing up on the shores of southern Spain with 64 pounds of plastic in its stomach. Every year on April 22nd, we celebrate Earth day, this is the one day a year when top tier scientists share any new developments on the state of the Earth. This is the only day in a year where the common masses read and react to the new research, this is the only time that people seem to care. In 2018 scientists published an abundance of new information on the state of our planet. Included in this research was information about a plastic crisis that is dominating our oceans, but is flying under the radar of average citizens.

We as a human race make and use and throw away more plastic than we can even comprehend and this global issue affect everyone, this is a global issue that affects everyone. When you buy something from the store, the odds that it is being sold as a single-use plastic are

pretty high. That single-use plastic will probably find its way to our oceans. Even if you live in a landlocked state, most ocean plastic pollution comes from inland. Yet the plastic used in big plastics such as bottles are recyclable Sandra Levillie wrote a paper on how the plastic crisis is getting to be as big and dangerous as climate change she claims, “most plastic bottles used for soft drinks and water are made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which is highly recyclable” (Levillie). Since the plastic used for bottles is recyclable then we simply need to recycle our bottles, then bam problem solved right? Well it is not that easy in reality only about 50% of the plastic bottles used every day make it to be recycled, the other 50% end up in landfills or in the ocean. PET plastic is recyclable so we could have all drink bottles made out of recycled plastic (RPET). Campaigners have encouraged beverage corporations to use RPET



bottles, but they are hesitant because they want their bottles to shine, believing that shiny bottles sell better.

Protesters that are apart of organizations like greenpeace do target both bottled water as well as soda; but there is more hostility toward the big soda companies because they create the most waste. Major drink companies like Coca-Cola know that they are the problem but do not want us to know that for sure, “Coca-Cola produces more than 100bn throwaway plastic bottles every

year – or 3,400 a second, according to analysis carried out by Greenpeace after the company refused to publicly disclose its global plastic usage”(Laville). The big drink companies know what they are doing but when it comes to money they choose to look the other way. Natural things decompose when they are exposed to sunlight, oxygen or water. Plastic doesn’t instead it fragments into smaller bits until nano-sized particles enter the food web, air, soil and the drinking water. If we keep using plastics that have not been recycled then we run the risk of further contaminating the water, “In one investigation, the nonprofit Orb Media found plastic fibers in 83 percent of drinking water samples all over the world, with some of the highest levels in drinking fountains at the US Capitol” (Irfan and Barclay). Plastic particles affects more than just the water in the capital, it affects all drinking water. Even if it says that water is purified, it might only be purified to a point. Bottling companies cannot detect micro plastic in their water, “In a separate investigation published this year, it found microplastic particles in 93 percent of the bottled water samples it tested (250 bottles from 11 leading brands including Dasani and Aquafina)” (Irfan and Barclay). The human race is literally consuming our own waste. There is nowhere to hide from our damage. Washing manmade textiles has shown to release thouthands of microfibers in the air. Microplastics have infected the human body. At a UK workshop, “30 scientists, doctors and others compared notes, and agreed unanimously that plastic is now in what we eat, drink and breathe, and constitutes a significant and growing threat to human health” (Vidal). It may not be sending us to the emergency room today, but it is a threat to us. The sad reality is, people do not believe in anything until it either a) directly affects them or b) everyone believes it and the president confirms it.

So is it the end of the human race? The oceans are 92% of the Earth's water supply so by ruining the oceans we are just ruining ourselves. Could this be how the human race goes extinct? Well it could be if things don't change. But there is still hope, something that could help is a government ban on all plastic shopping bags and single use plastic for packaging. Everyone can do their part, recycling is good but we can't recycle our way out of this crisis, it has become too big. But you can pledge to live a plastic free life, it is impossible to live totally plastic free but using a reusable water bottle, not taking a straw, to-go lids or stir stick are some little things that we can do. One thing that makes plastic so harmful to the environment is that it is full of toxins people do not even know about, "consumers must be helped to understand what they are being exposed to, and to navigate the complexity of what can be recycled, composted or burned" (Vidal). We know that animals are suffering from too much plastic in their diets because they can not find real food. We know what the toxins are doing to them, yet we haven't thought about what they are doing to us? We live on the same planet and share the same water and air. The last fail safe for this problem could be left to scientists, if all else fails, we should be able to count on the scientific community, "Scientists have discovered an enzyme that can digest plastic" (Irfan and Barclay). This enzyme can live on crystal PET and use it as an energy source. There are concerns however, that once all of the existing PET is gone, the enzyme could attack the very environment it was designed to save. Will it just die off or will it start to eat other things? Where this does offer some hope for our future, there are too many unknowns to account for to put all of our hope in this.



After reading this, it may make you think a few things a) well I'm over the age of 40 so this is the next generations problem or b) wow that's a lot I'll just go bury my head in the sand and ignore this because it's overwhelming. However it's important to remember that there is still time to make a change in behavior to redirect the problem.

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