

Key Vocabulary Overview	
plastic	a human-made material that is generally light and can be made into different shapes when heated
habitat	the place in which a plant or animal lives
plastic pollution	when excess plastic ends up in the environment, causing harm to humans, wildlife and habitats
pollution	the introduction of harmful materials into the environment, occurring naturally or as a result of human activities
landfill	a place where waste that is not composted, recycled or incinerated is buried under layers of earth
microplastics	extremely small pieces of plastic that are the result of plastic waste breaking down in the environment

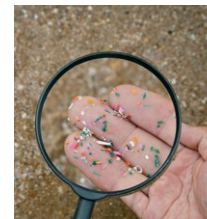
Plastic

Plastic is a synthetic (human-made) material used to make a wide variety of products. There are lots of different types of **plastic**. It is a very popular material to make products from because it is cheap to produce, easy to clean and very versatile (has different properties to suit different products).



Microplastics

Microplastics are extremely small pieces of **plastic** that are the result of **plastic** waste breaking down in the environment.



Single-Use and Reusable Plastics

Reusable products are designed to be used again and again, whereas single-use products are used once and then thrown away. Using something once before throwing it away creates a lot of waste.



What Happens to Plastic Waste?

Around 9% of **plastic** is recycled and around 12–19% is incinerated. The rest is buried in **landfills**. **Plastic** decomposes very slowly and can take up to 500 years to break down. We should aim to recycle **plastics** where possible.



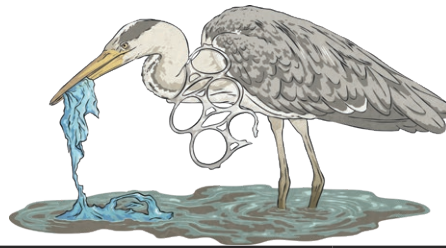
Plastic Pollution

When **plastic** products are discarded, they often end up buried in **landfills**. Many **plastics** find their way into the environment. **Plastics** regularly end up in aquatic **habitats** such as rivers, lakes and oceans.



Impact on Animals

Animals can become tangled in discarded **plastic**, which can limit their ability to move around and find food. Animals such as hyenas, elephants and cows have been found to have accidentally consumed **plastic** waste, which has caused damage to their organs.



Impact on Humans

Plastics have been found in the bodies of fish for sale in food markets. **Microplastics** have also been found in the blood and lungs of some humans. These **plastics** can release toxins into the human body.

Reducing the Impact of Plastic Pollution

Scientists and charities are working hard to reduce the impact of **plastic pollution**. Charities campaign for governments to tighten laws around **plastics** and to decrease the amount of **plastic** that companies can produce. Devices to sift and capture **plastics** in the water and in sand have been developed.

Alternatives to **plastic** are also being developed. Some, such as beeswax wraps for food, are revivals of traditional materials. Others, such as materials made from natural sources, are new innovations. One example of this is a type of packaging made out of mushrooms!



Impact on Plants

Plastic coverings over soil can prevent seed germination and suffocate growing plants. **Plastics** in the soil get in the way of growing roots.

Microplastics in the soil reduce its nutrient and water content and release harmful chemicals.



Impact on Marine Life

Plastic carrier bags often look like jellyfish floating in the sea. Animals such as seabirds and turtles, which usually eat jellyfish, can consume these bags.

Microplastics can cause damage to the organs of marine animals. They may damage the ability to reproduce for some animals, such as oysters. This can cause animal populations to decline.

