

Microplastics are pieces of plastic smaller than 5mm in size.

There are two kinds: primary microplastics and secondary microplastics.



There is evidence to suggest that plastics can carry toxins like chemicals and additives. When eaten, these can enter the flesh of marine species that humans subsequently eat.

Primary microplastics are purposefully made. E.g. microbeads in facewash, polyester clothing fibres.

Secondary microplastics result from the breakdown of larger plastic items in the ocean due to wave/solar action.

They enter the oceans through rivers and streams, because of people littering, and using products that contain microplastics that then go into drainage systems.

This is worrying because as yet, we do not entirely know the composition of the additives put into plastic products and how these interact with marine species. We therefore do not fully understand how they may impact on human health.

Studies have shown that microplastics are to be found everywhere in our oceans.

Smaller organisms are then eaten by larger marine species, entering the food chain.

Scientists are learning more about the impact of microplastics in the marine environment by examining animals ingesting microplastics labs, and through extensive fieldwork in multiple marine and coastal environments measuring the quantity and type of microplastics to be found and the species they are found in.

Animals accidentally eat plastics for a number of reasons. Usually these animals normally eat tiny organisms, like plankton, similar in size and shape to microplastics.



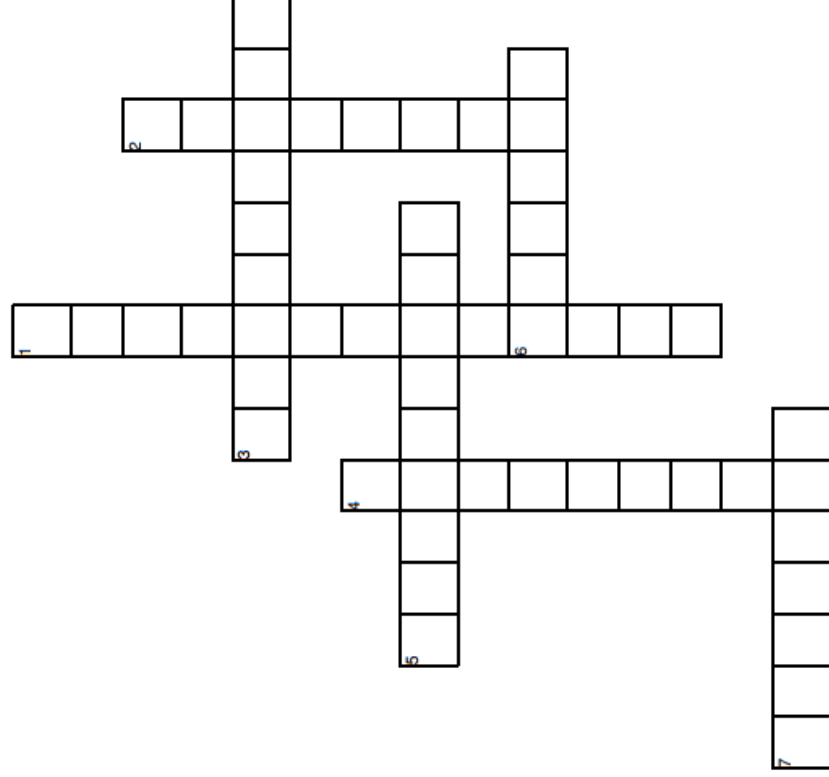
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Microplastics in the marine environment



Across

- When marine species ingest microplastics, they can enter the: (4,5)
- Microplastics resulting from the breakdown of larger pieces (9)
- Plastics can potentially carry these (e.g. chemicals and additives)(6)
- Microplastics that are purposefully made (7)

Down

- Pieces of plastic smaller than 5mm (13)
- Tiny marine organisms that lots of marine species feed on (8)
- A common plastic that clothes are often made from (9)