



Marine plastic litter and microplastics

Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants

Nature of the problem:

Marine plastic debris has been a growing concern since the rise of the plastic industry in the mid-1950s. Now, approximately 8 million tonnes of plastic enter our oceans each year

Most of plastics are used to make items for packaging and for construction. Smaller proportions are used in other applications, including the automotive industry, agriculture, and for electrical and electronic components.

Plastics pollution can arise at all stages during the life-cycle, from leakages during production and manufacturing, abrasion while products are in use to dumping or poor practices in handling wastes.

Larger pieces of plastic accumulate on beaches or sink to the ocean floor. A less significant share of plastic waste is carried on ocean currents and can accumulate in ocean gyres. Under the influence of sunshine and saltwater, larger pieces can break into microplastic particles. These are now very widely distributed through the oceans.

Larger pieces of plastic can cause harm directly to marine animals – for example, by entanglement in debris. Many species of birds ingest smaller pieces of plastic. Plastics have been documented in many habitats and in over 100 species and can impact an organism at many levels. Microplastics have been documented in finfish, shellfish and crustaceans, which are consumed by humans - the health impacts are unknown.

Stockholm Convention on POPs:

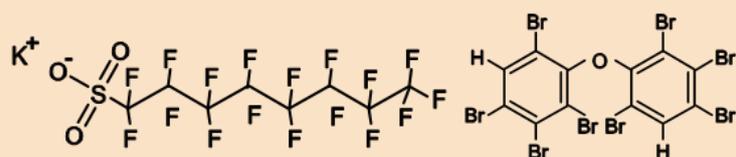
POPs are organic chemicals that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate in humans and wildlife, have harmful effects and have the potential for long-range environmental transport.

Plastics may contain hazardous substances including POPs, e.g. some plasticizers and flame retardants which may be slowly released into the sea. Plastics can also adsorb POPs such as PCB, DDT and dioxins and these are frequently detected in marine plastic litter.

The Stockholm Convention aims to protect human health and the environment from POPs.

As of 2018, the Convention controls 28 POPs, including those which have been used as additives, flame retardants or plasticizers in plastics such as:

- Brominated diphenyl ethers;
- Hexabromocyclododecane;
- Perfluorooctane sulfonic acid, its salts and perfluorooctane sulfonyl fluoride;
- Short-chain chlorinated paraffins.

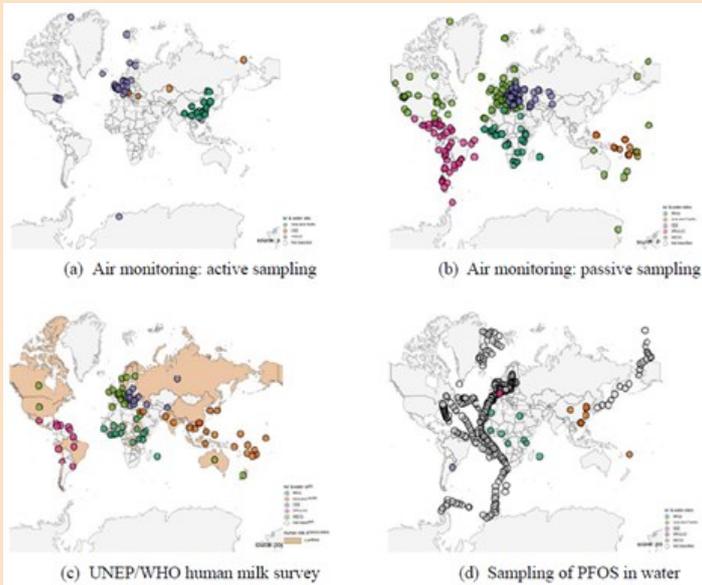


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Global Monitoring Plan for POPs:

The Global Monitoring Plan for POPs under the Stockholm Convention provides a harmonized organizational framework for the collection of globally comparable POPs monitoring data to illustrate concentration trends over time, as well as regional and global environmental transport.



Relevance to the Basel Convention:

The Basel Convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous waste and their disposal aims to protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects of hazardous wastes and “other wastes”, namely household waste and incinerator ash.

Some plastics are listed as “hazardous wastes” under the Convention, and many household wastes may include plastics.

The provisions of the Basel Convention pertaining to the minimization of the generation of wastes, their environmentally sound management as well as the control of their transboundary movement may therefore apply to plastics wastes.

In 2016, UNEA emphasized the importance of the elaboration under and application of existing instruments to further the environmentally sound management of waste, including waste prevention, minimization and recovery, to address the underlying causes of marine litter.

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Work under the Basel and Stockholm Conventions:

In 2017, the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention decided that its subsidiary body, the Open-ended Working Group consider relevant options available under the Convention to further address marine plastic litter and microplastics.

The Household Waste Partnership was established under the Basel Convention, through which the environmentally sound management of household wastes including plastics will be further explored. To join the Partnership, please contact the Secretariat.

The regional centres of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions were encouraged to work on the impact of plastic waste, marine plastic litter, microplastic, and measures for prevention and environmentally sound management.



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