



Plastic Pollution Factsheet

for Guides, Leaders and Coaches

What is meant by Plastic Pollution and their impacts?

Plastic pollution is a growing threat to the earth's climate as the majority of plastic originates from fossil fuels, releasing greenhouse gases at each stage of production. At current levels of production the scale of greenhouse gas emissions from the plastic lifecycle risks the ability of the global community to keep global temperature rises below 1.5°C.

Plastic is really helpful and we use it every single day in all sorts of items, it's cheap, versatile and virtually indestructible. However the same characteristics that make it great can also cause the problems and it is now found everywhere.

More than eight million tonnes of plastic ends up in the world's oceans each year with 80% of that, originating from land based sources, travelling along our drains and rivers *(World in Data report). Plastic is a valuable resource so we need to take a different approach to the way we use and dispose of it.

Plastic production is expected to treble by 2050 and of all plastic produced over 40% is single-use such as drinks bottles and food packaging, used only for a few minutes before being discarded. Plastic is not biodegradable, so it never truly disappears, instead over time it breaks down into thousands of pieces known as micro-plastics.

Animals including seals and turtles can get entangled in larger pieces of plastic causing harm. 90% of sea birds have eaten plastic with young birds fed plastic pieces by their parents, causing direct injury to their internal organs and leading to starvation, as there is no space in their stomach for food. [This 3 minute trailer of the Albatross film highlights the issue.](#) Fish are also impacted, consuming quantities of micro-plastics, confusing it in the water with food.

Plastic is also making its way up the food chain and has even been found in our tap water, honey, salt and the air which we breathe – the impact on human health is not yet known.



What is British Canoeing doing to contribute to reducing plastics?

Our Ambition: We want coastal and inland waters free from plastic pollution, rich in wildlife for all to enjoy the benefits of being connected with nature.

British Canoeing is working to influence government policy on single-use plastic. We have responded to Defra's consultations on proposals to ban commonly littered single-use plastic items in England and Defra's Call for Evidence on commonly littered and problematic plastic items, welcoming the suggestion to ban wet wipes containing plastic, but also urging the government to go further and implement an overarching policy which tackles the issue holistically, focussing on a circular economy whilst achieving net zero goals.

British Canoeing launched The Big Paddle Cleanup in 2022, a fortnight of action in June, for the paddling community to come together and remove plastic pollution and other litter from our waters.

The paddling community are extremely active on the plastic pollution agenda literally removing thousands of sacks over recent years with a number of clubs and delivery partners pledging to reduce their own use of single-use plastic.

British Canoeing launched our digital Go Green membership and committed to ring-fencing £2 of the membership fee of each member who signs up to the Go Green option, to help fund paddle clean-up kits for the paddling community.

Finally, we are working closely with manufactures such as Pyranha on solutions to reduce plastics.

What does all this mean for coaches?

You are part of the solution and can inspire others, consider removing 3 pieces of plastic pollution or other litter on each trip and using a refillable water bottle, switching away from throwaway plastics.

Get involved in the [Big Paddle Cleanup!](#) You can find helpful advice on how to organise a paddle cleanup [online here](#).

[Please log your finds here](#) with the Clear Access Clear Waters Campaign, so we can champion to government, the commitment of our community to protecting the places we paddle.

Keep up to date on the Clear Access Clear Waters campaign by [signing up to our e-newsletter here](#).

“Small actions multiplied by millions of people can change the world.” – Howard Zinn
Historian and Activist

