

5-8 Litter Free Case Study

In 2019, an unusual event occurred when a countless amount of “nurdles” washed up on Sullivan’s Island. As a cargo load of “nurdles” was being shipped, the load was accidently dumped into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Charleston. These “nurdles” are a type of plastic classified as microplastics, which are pieces of plastic that are less than 5 mm. That is the size of a poppy seed. Some microplastics include “nurdles,” as well as microbeads, which are sometimes in shampoo and facewash. However, most microplastics found are derived from bigger plastics, which would be classified as macroplastics. These macroplastics include water bottles, plastic bags, synthetic ropes, tires, plastic food containers, and other similar materials. Due to the large amount of macroplastics used by humans on a daily basis, these plastics end up in our oceans. As the macroplastics begin to wear down and degrade into even smaller pieces, they eventually become microplastics. These microplastics then become a part of the marine ecosystem as a potential food source.

What impact do micro- and macro- plastics have on organisms in the ocean? What about humans? How does it impact you? Discuss.

