

9-12 Litter Free Case Study 2

In 2019, an uncountable amount of “nurdles” washed up on Sullivan’s Island. As a cargo load of “nurdles” was being shipped, the load was accidentally 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. Microplastics manufactured that small include “nurdles” and microbeads that are sometimes in shampoo and facewash. However, most microplastics found are derived from bigger plastics, classified as macroplastics. Macroplastics include water bottles, plastic bags, synthetic ropes, tires, plastic food containers, etc. 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 smaller and 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? What can we do? Discuss.

