

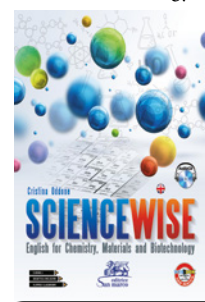
## Plastics consumption and the North Pacific Gyre

Life has changed a lot in the last few years. Living in this world requires a more intricate grasp on the challenges the environment faces. These complex new problems aren't actually new, but now we know about them and even worse, we know that the best human minds cannot figure out what to do about them. Meanwhile, the simpler problems we used to worry about seem to have disappeared. Plastic consumption has got worse in the last 15 years. Douglas Woodring, a co-founder of the California and Hong-Kong based Ocean Recovery Alliance, is trying to get plastic back in the green conversation. He made his first voyage to the "garbage patch" in the Pacific Ocean: also known as the North Pacific Gyre, it is a massive swath of plastic-strewn ocean about 1000 miles off the coast of Hawaii, which is estimated to be twice as big as the state of Texas. One of the goals of Woodring's ongoing project is to explore the problems associated with the gyre and examine the possibilities of a large-scale cleanup. The problem is that the gyre is in interna-

tional waters that belong to no one, and no nation has the jurisdiction over it. The gyre is important both because it has serious consequences for the marine life in the Pacific, and because it is a tangible illustration of our failure to deal with the fact that we are producing about 300 million tons of new plastic each year and recycle roughly 10% of it. In 2010 Woodring launched the Plastic Disclosure Project: inspired by the **Carbon Disclosure Project** (an international effort through which over 3000 organizations voluntarily measure their greenhouse gas emissions and water use, and adopt climate change strate-

The **Carbon Disclosure Project** is an independent not-for-profit organization holding the largest database of primary corporate climate change information in the world. Thousands of organizations from the world's major economies measure and disclose their greenhouse gas emissions, water use and climate change strategies through it.





gies) the PDP aims to get companies to establish benchmarks for their plastic use or to increase the level of plastic recycling. Will companies realistically volunteer to measure their plastic use without the incentive of something like a carbon market? The measurable benefits for volunteer companies could include direct savings by reducing their waste or gaining the attention of investors interested in socially responsible projects or looking for new opportunities in materials and waste processing. There are also intangible benefits as companies could get green boost for their brand.

This year, the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) identified marine plastics as one of the most worrying problems facing today's marine and human environments. Plastic marine waste is absorbing more toxic substances from seawater and sediments, including a wide range of chemicals which cause chronic effects such as endocrine disruption, mutagenicity and carcinogenicity. Some scientists are worried that these persistent contaminants could eventually end up in the food chain.

(adapted from *Time Science*, 17 June, 2011)

## ACTIVITIES

### 1 Answer the following questions.

- 1 What has changed in the problems we face today?
- 2 What has happened to simpler problems?
- 3 Has plastic consumption been reduced?
- 4 What is Woodruff trying to do?
- 5 What is the gyre and where is it?
- 6 Why is this area famous?
- 7 What is the Plastic Disclosure Project?
- 8 Why is this project associated with carbon?
- 9 What are the advantages for volunteer companies?
- 10 Why is marine plastics one of the most worrying problems?

### 2 Find a synonym for each of these words.

- |               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| 1 Grasp       | ..... |
| 2 Challenge   | ..... |
| 3 To face     | ..... |
| 4 Figure out  | ..... |
| 5 Green       | ..... |
| 6 Garbage     | ..... |
| 7 Swath       | ..... |
| 8 Benchmark   | ..... |
| 9 Intangible  | ..... |
| 10 Boost      | ..... |
| 11 Chronic    | ..... |
| 12 Disruption | ..... |

### 3 What did you know about this area called the North Pacific Gyre? Are there any other unfamous spots like this around the world? Do research and collect some information about them.