

We Must Act
for an
Environmentally
Sustainable
Future

**We Are Treating the Oceans
As Garbage Dumps**

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

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We Are Treating the Oceans As Garbage Dumps

Most of us will have seen pictures of the floating masses of garbage and plastic in the ocean, or of the ocean life trapped or injured by the debris. There is no doubt that the accumulation of plastic in our oceans and on our coastlines is a global crisis.

It has been estimated that almost 40% of the world's ocean surfaces are now covered by large masses of plastic. At the current rate of accumulation, it is expected that plastic objects will outnumber fish by 2050! Already, every year more than 700 species of fish and marine animals eat or get entangled in plastic litter. Thousands of birds, turtles, and other marine animals die as a result. Conservationists point to endangered species, like Hawaiian monk seals, Pacific loggerhead sea turtles, and the Steller sea lion, whose existence is under stress as a result of this pollution.

The statistics are staggering:

- Fish in the North Pacific ingest 12,000 to 24,000 tons of plastic each year.
- Half of sea turtles worldwide have ingested plastic.
- Pervasive plastic pollution on many beaches is affecting sea turtle reproduction.
- Hundreds of thousands of seabirds ingest plastic every year, reducing the storage volume of the stomach, causing starvation.
- 60% of all seabird species have eaten pieces of plastic, with that number predicted to increase to 99% by 2050.
- Dead seabirds, whales, and fish, including ones at markets in California, are often found with stomachs full of plastic.¹

The problem is that plastic is such a durable material. The US Environmental Protection Agency reports that all plastic ever made still exists. It has to go somewhere. One of the largest dumps of plastic on the planet is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a floating island of plastic garbage in the North Pacific Ocean. At 1.6 million square km, it is now 3 times the size of France.²

Plastic is everywhere. It is in packaging, beverage bottles, shopping bags, and even our clothing. It is, quite literally, in every aspect of our daily lives. And we are using (and disposing) more and more of it!

In the first decade of this century, we made more plastic than all the plastic in history up to the year 2000. And every year, billions of pounds of more plastic end up in the world's oceans. Studies estimate there are now 15–51 trillion pieces of plastic in the world's oceans—from the equator to the poles, from Arctic ice sheets to the sea floor. Not one square mile of surface ocean anywhere on earth is free of plastic pollution.³

Worse still, the rapid growth in the use of plastics does not appear to be abating. The fossil fuel industry is expecting to increase plastic production by 40% over the next

decade, and this will have significant climate impacts. Increasing plastic production means more GHGs, more air pollution, and more garbage in our oceans.

This is a global crisis that can, and must, be addressed. Efforts to curb the use of single-use plastics and disposable debris are gaining increased awareness and can make a difference. To preserve our oceans, international efforts to clean and safely dispose of garbage is necessary.

¹ <https://www.ecowatch.com/22-facts-about-plastic-pollution-and-10-things-wecan-do-about-it-1881885971.html>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/23/world/plastic-great-pacific-garbage-patch-intl/index.html>

³ https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/ocean_plastics/



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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