

PLASTIC IS FOREVER

Point No Point, WA – It wasn't just sand clinging to the children's toes as they climbed along enormous Puget Sound-worn logs on a Northwest beach at the tip of Kitsap Peninsula. Tiny balls of styrofoam, colorful bits of microplastic, and 2 mm-wide plastic discs, called "nurdles", industrial feedstock for all plastics, made up 1/5 of the beachscape that day. It was early February 2010, and as the mothers of the children looked closer, it became obvious that the entire beach was littered with plastics, both large and small. The mothers and children, homeschoolers ages 4-7 from Bainbridge Island, began collecting the plastics in their beach bags and a month-long study of marine debris was launched.



The group returned to Point No Point four more times the month of February and continued to collect the plastic debris, 15 minutes at a time, across approximately 100 meters of beach. The children then inventoried and categorized the plastics by kind and color, and then got to work turning them into pieces of art. What became immediately clear was that the source of the plastics is our homes, our towns, and our construction sites.

Recent attention on the problem of plastic in the oceans has focused on the North Pacific Central Gyre, the "garbage patch" of plastics believed to be twice the size of Texas. Yet, the problem of human-generated plastics in the ocean is alarmingly easy to document even closer to home. Plastics are washing up on our beaches with every high tide and this disturbing trend of plastic flotsam washing back up on land is the focus of *Plastic is Forever*, the project the group of homeschoolers and parents have designed as an educational display of mosaics, assemblages, and sculptures the group hopes will illustrate the very real threat and impact marine debris is having on our waters near home.



Land-based human-made plastics are the largest source of marine debris today – nearly 80% -- in oceans worldwide. In many regions, plastic materials constitute as much as 90 to 95% of the total amount of marine debris. Most of the land-based plastics are carried to our waters via urban runoff through storm drains and watersheds. An estimated 8 million items every day are discarded into coastal waters. That means there are 13,000 pieces of plastic in every square kilometer of ocean.



Plastic never goes away, it photodegrades, breaking up slowly into small pieces called micro-plastics, miniscule bits that eerily mimic the look of zooplankton, micro organisms that play a critical role in aquatic food webs. Microplastics in the marine environment now outweigh zooplankton 6 to 1 and they're working their way up the food web into our own bodies.



Plastic is Forever has found that the main items of plastic in Puget Sound are single-use disposable products, fireworks, and construction debris. Local scientists have now found evidence of toxics from plastics in the fat of Puget Sound's harbor seals and in the fish they eat as well as in the boli (indigestible food pellets) of our sea birds. *Plastic is Forever* hopes to illustrate, through art and film projects, the simple truths about plastic: It is not bio-degradable, very little of it is recycled (less than 4%), and if we don't find solutions to the problem of plastic debris in our local waters, our future beach-scapes, our aquatic food sources, and our marine wildlife will be tainted forever.



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Liesl Clark, Stevie Schmidt, Rebecca Rockefeller
Students: Finn Clark, Ava Rockefeller Campbell, Autumn Schmidt, Cleo Clark-Athans,
Mira Rockefeller Campbell

Contact: Liesl Clark (clarkliesl@mac.com)

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