

Marine Debris – we can make a difference.

Marine debris is a growing problem in the blue kingdom of our so beloved home planet. However once you get to see some figures of how much we do litter our seas one starts to think that how much we do take care of our surrounding environment.

A figure of 308,000 entanglements of only cetaceans worldwide per year gives us the first clue on how massive this problem really is. It is estimated that approximately 100,000 cetaceans die of marine debris every year. Unfortunately in most cases the only way we do know of this kind of events is when a carcass is been found and a proper autopsy has been made.

In April 2002, a dead minke whale, *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*, was found stranded on the Normandy Coast of France. 800kg of plastic bags and packaging, including two supermarket plastic bags were found from its stomach.

These are just numbers for concerning whales and dolphins but the marine debris does of course affect on any marine life; seals, fish, turtles, birds etc.

The entanglements and eating of our plastic waste is not the only effect marine debris does to the marine life and ecosystem, there's a lot still to be investigated concerning i.e. the potential toxicological impact of microplastics on marine mammals.

Fortunately many organizations, like IWC scientific committee, Ascobans and NOAA, have now paid attention to this growing problem and some protocols are being established to reduce the impact of marine debris.

Here are some examples to give you an idea of an estimated decomposition rate is for commonly found litter in the oceans:

- Cotton T-shirt 2-5 months
- Wool socks 1-5 years
- Plastic grocery bag 10 – 20 years
- Tin can 50 years
- Styrofoam cup 50 years
- Aluminum can – 200 years
- Plastic beverage holder 400 years
- Disposable diapers 450 years
- Fishing line or ghost nets 600 years

But really where it all comes to is on how we do behave. We can make the difference by our own behavior and the example we are giving to our children and how we can educate our fellow citizens. I find this even

more important act compared to the fact that technology is proceeding and inventing new decomposing materials for our daily consumption. However new inventions do not teach us consumers anything, we still behave the same way.

Let's change our old habits now.