

# 07. Waste and pollution



Raphaëla Le Gouvello Education packet - Windsurfing solo across the Indian Ocean

<http://www.respectocean.com>



## Life on board



*«I surf for the planet. I am departing for the high seas to gain the energy and strength this experience brings. I am leaving, so I can return to land. . . and bear witness to the importance of preserving the oceans and of sustainable development, which are the concerns of us all. [ . . . ].»*

Raphaëla

Our trash bins are getting bigger – and are piling up. Every person in France produces an average of 365 kilograms – more than 800 pounds – of garbage each year. That's 1.5 metric tons, or 1.6 U.S. tons, for a family of four. Packaging, whether paper, cardboard, metal or glass, makes up half of our household waste! A study by Ifremer (the French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea) tried to estimate how many pieces of trash lie on the ocean floor. The figures are enormous – 150 million in the North Sea, 50 million in the Bay of Biscay, 300 million in the Mediterranean Basin, 40 million in the Adriatic Sea. As for floating waste, few have even tried an estimate. Waste management nowadays focuses on two things people can do for themselves: **selective sorting** for recycling, and **responsible shopping** (products with the NF Environnement label or the European Ecolabel, and going for products that are sold in bulk, rechargeable, reloadable, repairable, etc.).

## Activity

One of the statements below is false. Which one?

1. You can make a cold-weather scarf out of two plastic bottles.
2. Recycled, 12 bottles of bubble bath can make a can for motor oil.
3. It takes 1,000 recycled water bottles to make a cover for a two-person comforter.
4. Cardboard boxes can be recycled around ten times.
5. Every metric ton of plastic that gets recycled saves 800 kilograms (about 1,700 lbs.) of crude oil.
6. Glass is 100% recyclable and can be recycled an infinite number of times.

## How long does it take to decompose...

|                   |              |            |                 |
|-------------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|
| A sheet of paper: | 2 to 3 weeks | A tin can: | 80 to 100 years |
| A cigarette butt: | 6 months     | Plastic:   | 20 to 450 years |
| Chewing gum:      | 5 years      | Glass:     | 4,000 years     |

## What Raphaëla does with her trash

As Raphaëla crosses the Indian Ocean, she'll produce various kinds of trash. Some are biodegradable or neutral and can be thrown into the sea (special wipes and towelettes, empty gas cylinders punctured so they sink). Others absolutely have to be kept, stored at the front of the vessel. Which Raphaëla will manage by compacting every plastic or aluminum package very tightly. Then they'll be thrown away when she arrives at her destination.

### Did you know?

Back in 1884, the Prefect of the Seine asked the people who lived in Paris to put their garbage in covered containers. His name was Eugène Poubelle. And today, "poubelle" is the French word for a garbage can!

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## Watch out for pollution!

**Paris, February 3, 2006 (AFP)** – More than six years after the Erika sank off the Brittany coast, France's Total petroleum group will face a criminal court in Paris on charges of polluting the ocean and complicity in endangering the lives of others.

[...] The last voyage of the Erika, from its departure from Dunkerque until it sank on December 12, 1999, with 30,900 metric tons of petroleum on board, was analyzed in detail in the court's preliminary investigation.

**Cherbourg, February 1, 2006 (AFP)** – The chemical tanker Ece sank off Cherbourg Wednesday morning after a collision, with 10,000 metric tons of phosphoric acid on board. [...] The 126-meter ship, flying the flag of the Marshall Islands, now lies 70 meters deep. [...] Local authorities have put a precautionary ban on fishing within a radius of one nautical mile (1.8 kilometers, 1.15 statute miles) around the wreck.

**Cannes, August 7, 2005 (AFP)** – Encountering an old tennis shoe or a tin can at mid-stroke while swimming along the Côte d'Azur – this is what an armada of cleanup boats is trying to spare bathers along the beaches of the Riviera. [...] Within a few minutes, a cleanup boat is on the spot, plowing into the layer of oil, which it breaks up with its turbines. When the cleanup is finished, the boat goes back to cruising the coast, picking up in its nets any floating macro-waste that crosses its path: boards, boxes, paper, plastic, bottles, vegetables – the list goes on and on.

## Activity

Based on the dispatches from the Agence France Presse (AFP) news agency, name the three types of pollution that are described. What are their environmental consequences?

## Question

What can you do to help protect the marine environment? Write down five suggestions to encourage protection of the sea and seashore.

## Good deeds for the maritime environment

For her voyage, Raphaëla made an agreement with Ifremer to record the waste she encounters, which will provide a better understanding of how waste travels, and help evaluate it in a relatively untraveled region.

Closer to the coasts, there are "Clean Seas" vessels that work various French beaches to keep the water clean for swimming, and sometimes decontaminate. Their tasks include, for example, to clean pebble beaches, collect waste and garbage from beaches inaccessible by road, and pick up floating refuse.

## An Aide et Action eyewitness account: A stopover in Cambodia

Even I – who am a bit hard-boiled, I admit – get sad when I think about the Steung Mean Chay dump, which isn't all that far from here as the swallow flies. It's hard to imagine an immense collection of burning trash, with lots of children, some of them very young, crisscrossing it all day long and sometimes sleeping right there with their families. Each time a garbage truck arrives, the kids crowd around to be the first to dig into its load, looking for anything that can be recycled or resold. They're called the "dump children."

From the *Salangane Notebooks*

As you can see, on our dear blue planet the need to sort waste isn't the same for everybody. For some, the first concern is preserving the environment; for others – it's a question of survival!