

## READING - 1

### 1. Plastic Bags

Twelve years ago, oceanographer Captain Charlie Moore was skippering his yacht the *Alguita* in the North Pacific. He sailed into a mass of floating plastic rubbish which took him and his crew a week to cross. This floating rubbish dump is now called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and doubles the size of the USA.

The United Nations says there are now 15,000 pieces of plastic in every square kilometre of sea everywhere in the world. A walk along any beach will give you some idea of the seriousness of plastic pollution.

The trouble is, when we throw out plastic with the trash, the plastic doesn't go away. Plastic does not biodegrade. It photo degrades into smaller and smaller particles which then enter the food chain. Plastics contain cancer-causing chemicals such as vinyl chloride which travel along the food chain in increasing concentrations and end up in our fish and chips, along with hormone disruptors such as bisphenol A. Scientists try to tell us that we are killing ourselves as well as other animals. At least 200 species are, as I speak, being killed by plastic. Whales, dolphins, turtles and albatross confuse floating plastic, especially shopping bags and six-pack rings, with jellyfish. A dead Minke whale, washed up on a Normandy beach, was found to have eaten plastic bags from supermarkets and had died a dreadful death.

8% of all the world's oil production is for plastic. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, companies manufacture 5 billion plastic bags a year. Of all the plastic produced annually, half is for packaging which gets thrown out with the trash a few minutes after purchase. And 10% of all rubbish is plastic bags which take from 400 to 1000 years to degrade. Less than one per cent of plastic bags are recycled and only 4% of all other plastic waste, the reason being it is simply too expensive to do.

The same lobbies that work against electric vehicles and renewable energies, put governments under pressure not to act against plastic pollution. This is because plastic represents 8% of all the world's oil production. These lobbies, acting on behalf of oil companies, represent an unsustainable approach to profit. To paraphrase the Cree Indian prophecy, only when we have wiped everything out will we realise that money cannot be eaten.

Some countries have rebelled and banned plastic bags. And the first was brave Bangladesh. Then China took the same decision and, according to CNN Asia, saves itself 37 million barrels of oil a year. Botswana, Canada, Israel, Kenya, Rwanda, Singapore and South Africa have also banned plastic bags. Notice how many of the world's richest countries are not on this list. It's an absolute disgrace.

Alright, then. If we can't use plastic bags, how do we carry home the shopping? Take a back pack or a folding shopping trolley. Change supermarket to one that provides biodegradable bags, made from potato starch for example. Use consumer power.

Personally speaking, what I need to find now, is a supermarket that sells biodegradable bin liners, otherwise I still end up using plastic. I recently spent a week in New Zealand on honeymoon and saw that everyone was using special paper bin liners. I wish we did something similar here in Spain.

Think globally, act locally. A small Australian town is now one step ahead of the rest of the world. The inhabitants of Bundanoon in New South Wales have banned plastic bottles from the town. We need to follow their example and eliminate plastic from our lives, take care of the earth and vote for people we think will do the same.