



**Canal &  
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Find out about...

# Plastic Pollution



# Hello!

At the Canal & River Trust, we believe life's better by water. As the charity looking after over 2,000 miles of canals and rivers, we want everyone to experience and enjoy the amazing places on their doorstep.

Spending time by water can help make us feel happier and less worried. But our research shows that **over half a million items of plastic** reach the oceans from our canals and rivers every year – and this is having a negative impact on our wildlife, plant life and our own lives. The majority of this plastic is recyclable or could be re-used in creative and innovative ways. But more of that later – let's take a look at the facts.



## Plastic Fact

**Around 500,000 pieces of plastic from our waterways end up in the ocean every year**

Litter and fly tipping costs us over £1 million a year. But it's not just about the money, the cost to nature is even greater. And because it looks so ugly, it puts people off wanting to visit their local waterway, too.

**But, there's hope!** We can all make small changes to help improve the waterway environment for everyone and everything that lives in and around it – and that's where this pack comes in.

## About this pack

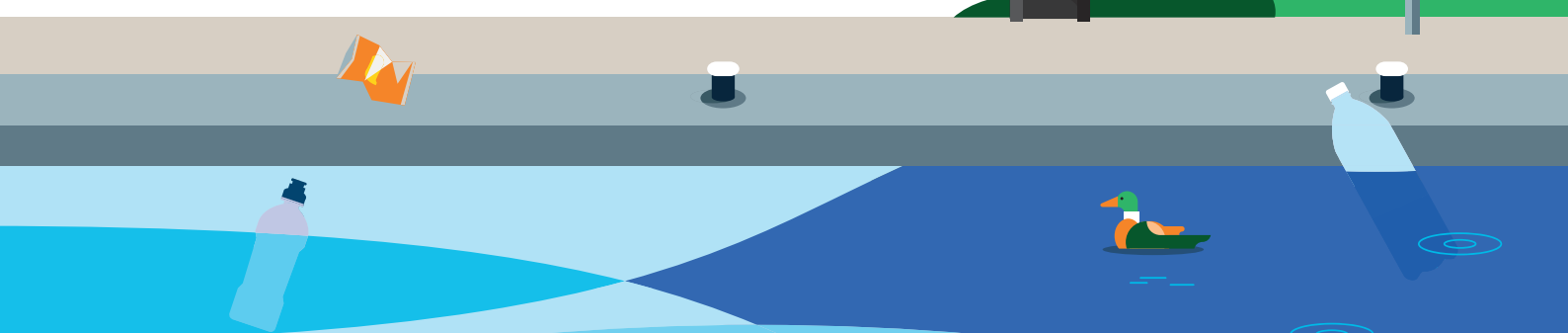
Over the next eight pages, you can **Learn** about plastic pollution in canals and rivers, check out other things to **Watch & Read** on the topic, and get inspiration for **Next Steps** so you can share what you've learned or done with other people.

**Plus** we've put together activities for you to **Create & Do**. These can help you reduce, reuse and recycle, and make small changes that can make a big impact on the issue of plastic pollution. You can find them at [canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources)



### Quick Question

**If you throw away a plastic bottle today, without recycling it, what year will it be when it's broken down?**



# The plastic problem & what we can do to help

Lots of the things we use every day are made out of one material: Plastic.

Plastic is cheap, light and tough but this comes at a cost to the environment

**40%**  
of the plastic we produce is for packaging

A plastic drink bottle can take around **450 years** to break down

When plastic breaks down it can be swallowed by animals or release toxic chemicals

Plastic is used in construction, clothing, furniture, transport and car tyres

We produce over **300 million tonnes** of plastic every year

There are lots of types of plastic and it's hard to recycle from mixed waste

While it's sometimes necessary to use plastic items, it's important that we all take a bit more responsibility for the waste we create.

Three ways we can all make less rubbish:

- 1 Reduce**  
buy less, throw less away
- 2 Reuse**  
think of ways you can use something again and again
- 3 Recycle**  
this is when an old item is broken up or melted down and used again to make something new

## Can you think of 5 things you could do to reduce, reuse & recycle?

Reduce	Reuse	Recycle

## How could YOU make a difference in your local community?

There are a few things we can all do to lead change in our own communities. Think about your school, college, workplace or youth club:

1. Do you have recycling bins and do you know what can be recycled?
2. Do you use disposable cups and plates?
3. What happens to your school or work uniform when you grow out of it or move on?
4. What would encourage your friends or the wider community to reduce, reuse and recycle?

*Any ideas of what YOU could do?*

# The recycling challenge

The word 'plastic' refers to lots of different materials. Take a crisp packet and a car bumper, for example. They're both plastic but there are many difference between them. It's these differences that make recycling plastics a challenge.

Find something made from plastic, like food packaging or a bottle. Can you see any of these logos? These tell you which parts can be recycled.



Can you see a recycling symbol with a number in it stamped into the plastic? There are seven numbers and they help people in recycling centres to separate the different types, and tell them whether they can be recycled.



## Plastic Fact

### Sorting plastics is complicated

The body of a plastic milk bottle is a different plastic to the lid so they need to be separated. Even plastic that can be recycled might be refused if it's not washed. This is called contamination and can cause plastic to go to landfill unnecessarily.

**So, please wash your plastic before you recycle it!**

## What happens next?

- 1 Sorted plastic is sold to companies who turn them into useful materials
- 2 In the UK, we send thousands of tonnes of waste plastic to countries like Malaysia, Turkey and Poland
- 3 It's shredded, washed, melted and turned into pellets which can become new products

But these pellets can be a problem as they are a form of microplastic. They are easily spilled in factories and can then be washed out to sea, where they're eaten by smaller creatures.



**Did you know...**

**72% of UK tap water is contaminated with microplastics**

(2017 survey)



# The plastic in our waterways

Did you watch the Blue Planet II series? It was a heart-breaking documentary about the large amount of plastic in our oceans. The same thing is happening in our 2,000 miles of canals and rivers.

We've already mentioned that 500,000 pieces of plastic from our waterways end up in the ocean each year. That means around 80% of plastic in the ocean was dropped inland. Things like bottles, wrappers and straws all have a damaging impact on underwater life. Large pieces of plastic can trap animals; small pieces can be eaten, blocking the gut and slowly starving the animal.

Here at the Canal & River Trust we have endless plastic and fly-tipping incidents to deal with:

We clear plastics and litter from **230 sites**

**24 million** items of plastic and litter dropped or blown onto our waterways every year

We spend **£1 million** a year dealing with this rubbish

**14 million** items (59%) are plastics such as bags, bottles, disposable cups and food wrappers

We empty **900** public litter bins over **46,000** times a year

Our volunteers spend over **100,000 hours** each year clearing litter from our towpaths and canals

However, despite our hard work, our efforts alone are not enough to stem the tide.



## Plastic Fact

1,562 items of plastic leave our waterways and head towards the sea every single day.

**That's more than 500,000 items each year!**

## What litter do we find in our canals & rivers?

**59%**

is plastic

**29%**

is easily recyclable materials (paper, card, metal or glass)

This litter is collected by our litter-pick teams or is washed or blown into the water. Floating litter moves with the prevailing flow or wind and either becomes trapped in a reed fringe, against a moored boat or up against a lock gate. Alternatively it keeps moving until it's washed out to sea at one of the 20 locations where our canals and rivers connect with tidal water or large rivers.



# How can we tackle the plastic pollution problem?

Our canals and rivers are easily accessible. These blue and green 'ribbons' run through the heart of our towns and cities and over four million people regularly spend time by them. However, with almost 1 in 5 people admitting to dropping litter, a lot of this will unfortunately end up in the waterways.

## What can we do to make a difference?

If the amount of single-use plastic is reduced, reused or recycled – or if easily recycled plastics are disposed of correctly – we can **reduce the litter in our waterways by over 80%, improve our spaces and reduce the cost burden on the Trust.** Find the right bin or take it home!

We need to raise awareness with the people who use our canals and rivers and work with our neighbours. Together we can contribute to making positive changes and responsible choices – and encourage others to do the same. Our small, local actions could have a huge global impact!

### Plastic Fact

If every time someone visited our waterways, they picked up and disposed of just one piece of plastic, within a year there would be no plastic left.

### Quick Question

What's your nearest waterway and what's it called? Check out <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work> to find out if you're not sure.

## Watch & Read

Hopefully this pack has inspired you to look at the plastic pollution problem in more depth. Dive in to the following links:

### Recycling as art

Read about [Camilla Brendon](#) – a passionate artist whose projects focus on the environment, materials and plant life. Creating works of art as she goes, Camilla shows us how the materials around us and particularly by water needn't be tossed aside, or worse left to rot, but instead can be used, and reused

### 10 ways

Read [10 ways to reduce plastic pollution in our canals](#) and learn how to help us reduce plastics and litter in our waterways

### Quiz

Test your knowledge by taking our [Plastic Pollution quiz](#)

### Interested to find out more?

Read our full [plastics challenge report](#) and find out what we are doing to play our part.

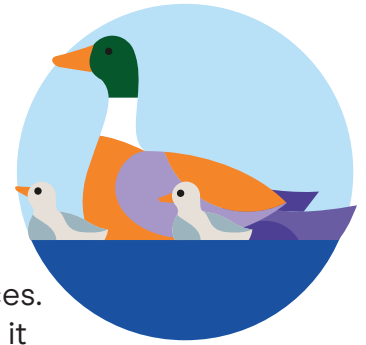
Search our website at [canalrivertrust.org.uk](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk) to find all these and more.



# Create & Do

We've put together a range of activities you can do in your own home, to encourage you to think about how you can reduce your plastic use, and reuse and recycle more!

You can find these activity sheets at [canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources). Each one indicates the resources you'll need and some specify how long it might take you.



## Let's learn:

### Waterway wildlife

Test your knowledge of waterway wildlife with our short quiz.

## Let's learn:

### Banding together

This activity will help you to see the waterway like an animal and to understand how a piece of plastic litter might cause an animal harm.

## Let's change:

### Household challenge

Think about how you use plastics and where you may be able to reduce, reuse and recycle.

## Let's create:

### What a load of rubbish!

Put all that plastic (particularly the stuff that can't currently be recycled!) to good use and get creative making plastic sculptures, trash prints, or a rubbish monster!

## Let's change:

### Keep a plastics diary

Record how much plastic you throw away or recycle every day for a fortnight. Think about how you could reduce, reuse and recycle more. Make a plan to reduce the amount of plastic you throw away. You could set yourself a weekly, monthly and yearly target.

## Let's create:

### Plastic bag weaving

Reuse old plastic bags in a clever way that keeps them from being thrown away. You'll end up with a patch of colourful mat which can be turned into a bigger one by joining patches together.

## Let's create:

### Build a bottle greenhouse

Use plastic bottles to create the walls and roof of a greenhouse. The size and shape is up to you!

## Let's create: Design a poster

This should teach people about actions they can take to reduce, reuse and recycle. Think about who your target audience should be, where you could display your poster and think about any extra research you could do.

## Let's create:

### Produce a video or vlog

This should teach people about actions they can take to reduce, reuse and recycle. Think about who your target audience should be, where you could display your poster and think about any extra research you could do.

## Let's create:

### Share a story

This is your chance to write a song, poem or short story to communicate the story of plastics in our waterways. You can approach it from any angle that inspires you.

## Let's learn:

### Plan a themed task around reduce – reuse – recycle

This could be a quiz, game, an idea for a craft project or a competition that could be used with your friends or used by our Coordinators with school and uniformed groups.



# Next Steps

We've given you lots of information about the plastic pollution problem, so now it's over to you! If you'd like to share what you've learned with other people, here are some ideas of what you can do:

## Create a video or vlog

– talk about why plastic pollution in the waterways is such an important issue and what people can do to help. For more information please see our 'Creating a Vlog' hints and tips – [canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-resources)

Contact us so we can share your story and help celebrate your success!  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/ways-to-contact-us>

**Write a blog or keep a video diary** – share your plastics diary or how you're doing in your plastics challenge.

**And don't forget**, please tag us in your social media posts to share your art work, stories or photos on facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

 [/canalrivertrust](https://www.facebook.com/canalrivertrust)

 [@canalrivertrust](https://twitter.com/canalrivertrust)

 [@canalrivertrust](https://www.instagram.com/canalrivertrust)

Always remember to keep yourself safe online at all times. Speak to your parent, carer, teacher or group leader for advice and check out this guidance from [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)

If you've been inspired by everything you have learned and done, we'd love you to get more involved!

Contact us to find out about opportunities in your local area.

We hope to hear from you soon!

## To get involved:

visit: [canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer)

email: [volunteer@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

For more information on our youth & community engagement work please visit [canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-engagement](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/youth-engagement)



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