

LISTENING: The Great Pacific Garbage Patch

Speaker: Where is the world's biggest collection of garbage? In the United States? In China? No. It's in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

In the Pacific Ocean there's an area called the **Northern** Pacific Gyre.

Here ocean currents come together and move in a large circle. In this **circular** movement, the currents collect garbage—lots and lots of garbage. People call it the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. And, 90 percent of this garbage is plastic.

Where did all this garbage come from? Did boats come and throw it here **on purpose**? No. Eighty percent of it comes from land. Garbage floats down rivers and streams and into the ocean. It comes from every country whose **shoreline** touches the Pacific. Plastic bags are carried out to sea with the wind. Then the ocean currents carry all of this garbage to the great garbage patch. Actually, there are two patches, an eastern patch and a western patch.

A sailor named Charles Moore discovered the patches in 1997, when sailing near Hawaii. He suddenly found himself travelling day after day through waters filled with garbage, most of it plastic. At that time, he calculated that there were more than 3 million tons of plastic **floating** in the water. At one point he found the patch was 100 feet deep. In 2005, Moore

estimated the size of the two patches together as 10 million square miles, an area the size of Africa.

All of this garbage is hurting the **environment**. Plastics attract poisons like DDT and PCBs that are already in the water. This is a serious danger to all kinds of **marine** life. Fish and seabirds often think little pieces of plastic are a kind of food and they eat it. Scientists now often find plastic in the **stomachs** of dead fish and birds. Plastic kills more than one million seabirds every year.

Most plastic is not **biodegradable**. That means it does not go away. Almost all the plastic produced in the world in the last 60 years is still in the environment. Scientists say that cleaning up the garbage patches is impossible. The only thing that will help the situation at all is better control of waste on land. We need to **reduce** the amount of plastic we produce and use. We must control the amount of waste water that goes into the ocean. We also have to keep beaches, in fact the whole shoreline, clean.