

New report exposes recent cases of pellet pollution and calls for the EU to adopt measures

Around 230 000 tonnes of nurdles end up in the Ocean every year at the global level. While members from the plastic chain claim that this pollution is under control, Surfrider Europe, on behalf of the Rethink Plastic alliance, and along with other NGOs, releases today a new report called “Plastic giants polluting through the backdoor” which highlights 5 recent cases of pellet pollution around Europe. As part of its commitments under the new circular economy action plan, and as the Commission has committed to come up with a zero-pollution strategy next year, the Alliance is calling on the European commission to adopt legal measures to stop pellet pollution once and for all.

Break the plastic wave : time to act against microplastics

To date, pellet pollution has not been regulated by EU decision makers, while the voluntary industry initiative (Operation Clean Sweep) has proven to be unable to stop the pollution in nearly 30 years of volunteer action. Yet, pellet pollution is the second most significant primary source of microplastic pollution in our Ocean.

Through the presentation of five case studies across Europe, this report exposes the consequences of plastic production related pollution on the environment and on local communities, detailing the reactions of citizens and local associations to the pollution, and the responses of the companies responsible. These case studies finally allow the alliance to draw a series of conclusions which all plead for urgent, legal measures to be adopted.

“What the case studies show is that pellet pollution continues to be out of control today, despite repeated declarations from the plastics giants that everything is going in the right direction. Plastic pollution continues to occur on a large scale with dramatic impacts on nature and our Ocean. Meanwhile, local communities are left to deal with the pollution. It’s time for the EU to adopt legal measures to hold companies accountable”, explains Gaëlle Haut, EU affairs officer at Surfrider Europe.

A massive plastic production-related pollution with impacts on the Ocean and health

Up to 160 000 tonnes of nurdles are lost every year in Europe. Plastic pellets, also called nurdles or mermaid tears, are a raw material used in the manufacturing of plastic items. They are the virgin plastic that is melted and molded into plastic items. Pellets end up in nature when handled irresponsibly by plastic producers, transporters, recyclers or converters.

Pellets accumulate in the sea, in surface waters and rivers and near industrial sites or ports. Pollution has been going on for decades. Plastic pellets have many impacts on marine ecosystems. They cause severe damage to marine life and threaten terrestrial animals; because of their colour and shape, they are often mistaken for food by marine animals and birds, and, once ingested, they get stuck in the animal's stomach, causing starvation and death.

Once released into the environment, pellets, which already contain harmful additives, also attract and absorb toxic particles and bacteria which are present in the water. This harmful cocktail can then enter the food chain, and reach our bodies, through the fish and seafood we eat.

Pellet pollution also impacts recreational activities (such as water sports), deteriorates habitats and affects tourist activities. In almost all cases of pollution, local communities are left to deal with the pollution, without any responsibility being established.

EU action needed

Clearer responsibility and accountability are needed to prevent pellet pollution. Surfrider Foundation Europe and its partners from the Rethink Plastic alliance call on the European Commission to adopt measures to prevent plastic pellets from polluting our Ocean and compel companies to act.

Pellet pollution adds to the estimated 12 million tonnes of plastics that end up in the Ocean every year. With plastic production projected to double by 2035 and to almost quadruple by 2050, it is urgent that the plastic production and transformation chain's contribution to the plastic crisis is recognised and addressed.

In order to know more [Surfrider Foundation Europe](#)

CONTACT :

EU affairs programme manager
Haut Gaëlle | ghaut@surfrider.eu
+32 (0)4 87 16 94 53



SURFRIDER FOUNDATION EUROPE - 33 Allée du Moura - 64200 Biarritz
www.surfrider.eu