**Plastic Consumption causing World Indigestion**

As I carry out some research in relation to one of our school presentations, I re-run the you-tube trailer on my laptop (*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zrn4-FfbXw*). 300 million tonnes of plastic produced globally every year. 8 million tonnes of plastic dumped into the oceans every year. Garbage, most of which is plastic waste, collects in the oceans contributing to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.


*Source:*
*https://www.google.com.mt/search?q=great+pacific&rlz=1C1BLWB_enMT519MT519&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjA98Dm8OjZAhUCvRQKHTn8DqsQ_AUICigB&biw=1821&bih=849#imgdii=3naNxVGdzePOzM:&imgrc=Q7nTqd82R84J6M:*

As I stand in my room, I look around me. I realize that I am surrounded with this material. A plastic pen, a plastic sharpener and a plastic ruler lie scattered on my desk. School worksheets are neatly filed in plastic folders within a plastic file. A white plastic bag lines my bin. My school plastic bottle still contains a small volume of water. The apertures of my balcony are made of PVC (polyvinylchloride).

Plastic is a widely used material in our day to day lives. It is convenient, available, light weight, relatively cheap and durable. Its durability makes it ideal for use because it resists corrosion but it is its durability that is an environmental concern. Statistical information (*https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/feb/22/plastics-recycling-trash-chemicals-styrofoam-packaging*) shows that in fact only 14% of the disposed plastics are recycled. The remaining 86% finish in the environment. Plastic is not biodegradable and once produced it cannot be naturally destroyed. For this reason, when plastic is disposed of, it disrupts habitats and harms wildlife especially if ingested. Harmful chemicals released from plastics are toxic to the soil and to growing crops. Moreover, it also releases toxins into groundwater, which is an invaluable resource.

***Photographs of plastic waste in the seas around the Maltese Islands (Photos taken in Birgu)***

## Recycling of Plastic in Malta

In Malta families are encouraged to recycle clean glass, metal, paper and plastic objects. Wasteserv is responsible for the home collection of recyclable waste where on a fixed number of days recyclable material is collected and taken to the Sant' Antnin recycling plant in Marsascala. At this plant recyclable waste may be used to provide renewable energy, for compost or exported. Recent statistics, the results of which have been published in local newspapers. (*https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20171127/local/malta-has-poorest-eu-recycling-rate-and-*

*its-getting-worse.664185*) show that the amount of recyclable waste in Malta is the lowest in the European Union. In fact there has been a DECREASE of 10% in the amount of waste recycled by Maltese families since 2012. To encourage people to recycle their plastic waste, there are various initiatives around the Maltese islands. One such initiative is the *Crush and Win* activity organised by GreenPak where people who crush and place their labelled plastic bottles for recycling have the opportunity of winning a €100 prize in cash. (*https://lovinmalta.com/sponsored/sponsored-announcement/you-can-win-100-every-day-by-simply-taking-out-your-trash*)

**The proposal of the Incinerator**

Landfills around the Maltese islands are fast reaching their maximum capacity. For this reason, the building of a new incinerator is being taken into consideration. This incinerator will be finished by 2023 and its aim is to reduce the amount of disposed waste by 40% (*http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-02-28/local-news/Waste-incinerator-planned-to-be-built-in-Maghtab-by-2023-will-address-40-per-cent-of-waste-6736185440*). Among other materials to be incinerated, plastic is one of the materials. The problem with burning plastics is that toxins harmful to living organisms are released into the atmosphere. (*http://www.wecf.eu/cms/download/2004-2005/homeburning_plastics.p*)

**Initiatives within our School**

Our school community is very aware of the universal problem caused by plastic. Sponsored by the Litterless Campaign, big water dispensers were bought and students were encouraged to fill re-usable water bottles rather than buy new plastic bottles each time. The re-filling of water bottles was also being done at less cost than buying a new 500ml water bottle.

Results show that whereas before the initiative was launched, an average of 150 plastic bottles were being sold to students per week, this amount was reduced by 50% after the initiative was launched. The Eko-Skola committee is still working to encourage ALL students within the community to have their own re-usable water bottles and the final aim is to have no plastic water bottles being sold per week. For this reason, members of the committee have thought of having re-usable water bottles on sale to encourage ALL students to have their own re-usable plastic bottle.

**The way forward**

The way forward towards a more environmental friendly community is to **increase awareness**. If people are made aware of the detrimental effects of plastic on our environment, there will surely be an attitude change towards the material. Awareness is heightened through **education** of the population at large. Such education is transmitted through schools, media and through everyday places that people visit. The population should be encouraged to recycle their plastic waste but more importantly to re-use and **reduce** their plastic waste. This could be done by encouraging less use of:

- plastic drinking straws,
- disposable plastic bags,
- take-away coffee cups with plastic lids,
- cling film on pre-packaged products such as vegetables and cheeses,
- individual food servings (such as ketchup servings and coffee pods)

Fines could be introduced by government administrations on individuals and establishments that produce excessive plastic waste. We should all aim towards reducing the use of this non-biodegradable product which is causing great harm to the environment because it cannot be broken down and digested by our home, planet Earth.