

Rotary



"IYFR Plastic Free Waters" is a special IYFR Operation intended to significantly reduce the quantity of plastic waste that daily enter in the rivers, lakes, seas and oceans of the Blue Planet.

We aspire to a world where the use of plastic is, when it is strictly necessary, absolutely responsible; where no plastic waste is left in the environment and no plastic garbage finds its way into lakes and the seas. A world where such waste is properly collected, possibly recovered and recycled, and where the large concentrations plaguing the lakes and the seas are reduced by closing their supply channels.

We are not interested in speculation or business in this planetary disaster: our aim is to provide independent and disinterested direction, support and assistance, based mainly on the knowledge and skills of Rotarians.

The combined interests of the oil companies, plastic producers, multinational drinks and food producers and the big retail organization result in an unsustainable and ever-growing quantity of plastic put into circulation. These factors combined to the lack of education, ignorance and human carelessness cause about 23,000 tons of plastic waste per day to find their way into the lakes and seas, directly or through rivers that flow into them.

The floating part of the waste, spreads over an area of millions of square metres, and the microplastics that are created for its progressive degradation, pollute the waters and suffocate the seafloor for hundreds of years.

Plankton, fish, cetaceans and other animals and seabirds confuse them for food and feed on them. They feel fed, stop nourishing and eventually die.

Moreover, in this way, plastic can enter into the human food chain.

Due to currents and winds, the floating plastic debris have formed five huge vortexes in the Oceans and smaller accumulation in lakes and in the confined seas like the Baltic and Mediterranean. Trying to retrieve the floating waste has proved to be totally ineffective when using passive type barriers and minimally effective when using active solutions. Both methods have proved to be extremely expensive and not sustainable.

It has to be noted that all the plastic garbage collected on the world's beaches in hundreds of thousands clean-up operations held by millions of volunteers over the last 30 years, is equivalent of what enters into the seas in less than one week. However, even if the results seem completely discouraging, this is the best we can do, in that it prevents the return of the beached litter into the sea.

It remains the problem of ghost nets. They plague all the seas and must be removed by experts because it might be dangerous and because removing a long time submerged one might result a huger damage for the environment. IYFR PFW is working to create, with ESRAG, and various National Coast Guards a Global Reporting Net that can be used by anybody when navigating/diving could be spotting one of those killer net.

Dozens of Districts around the world and IYFR are working to raise awareness on the problem and propose solutions, which Rotary International, Districts, Clubs and individual Rotarians can adopt to help and solve this problem that is a real and actual global emergency.

It is possible to significantly reduce the large plastic garbage concentrations plaguing the lakes and the seas only by closing their supply channels, so it is necessary:

- To raise awareness among people about the danger and damage to the Planet that the unwarranted use of plastics has already caused and the damage it might cause in the future.
- To progressively but significantly reduce the amount of plastic that is abandoned in canals, and rivers, and, at the same time, to collect as far as feasible the plastics from the rivers before it reaches the sea
- Increase, as far as possible, the progression of the circular economy, by finding reliable systems and adequate procedures and rules to collect, treat and recycle the plastic garbage;
- support the research of biodegradable materials that can be sustainably used in place of plastic single use objects, correspondingly reducing the use of non-biodegradable plastics and fabrics, that are the main responsible for the microfibers and nano plastics eventually entering in the human chain of food.

These results can be achieved by:

- Informing and involving students and, through them, their families and the whole communities, so that they will be able to lead the drive towards the refusal of the unnecessary plastics

- Using the knowledge of Rotarians to develop and promote new materials, new technologies and sustainable activities for plastic waste recovery and treatment-transformation

- Establishing links with Governments, supporting Rotarian Action Groups and National Eco-friendly Groups that can boost services, new regulations, and far-sighted laws to support the good practices and discourage the irresponsible ones.

The action with the schools has been going on for years and, of course, it will take time. During this pandemic period the activity had to be slowed down if not suspended, since all the teaching process had to be reviewed.

We are evaluating the effectiveness of several actual and experimental systems of river barriers able to flow the plastic debris into a collection basin from where it can be raised, selected, and made available for further treatment or recycling.

Ultimately, although "awareness" is rapidly increasing towards active participation levels also thanks to our commitment, our plan is to operate directly, and in particular in cooperation with the relevant Clubs and Districts, in order to:

- Proceed with school information campaigns
- Use all available means, to feed and disseminate information about the mission and the results gradually achieved.
- Organise the production of information and educational material by experts from the 3 different world Areas of our International Yachting Fellowship
- Locally identify the main polluted waters for pilot activities and possible installations; involve local Communities and Organisations in the projects.
- Cooperate with the Rotary International's RAGs and standard channels and influence to engage and support the PFW Service
- Raise funds to support the development of knowledge, studies, technologies and procedures to minimise the use of disposable plastics that are no longer sustainable, and to promote the recovery and recycling of used plastics

The more we are, the louder will be our common voice and longer the range we will be attaining.

Rapallo, May 8, 2021

The IYFR Op PFW Coordinator
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