

Microplastics in the Great Lakes

Introduction

Microplastics are small pieces of plastic that are 5 mm in diameter or smaller. They are becoming a large problem in the Great Lakes, as well as in most water bodies, due to litter of plastic items and personal care products.

Some of the more common things that microplastics come from are cigarette butts, plastic bottles, facewash, shampoo, straws, fishing line, and clothes that contain a polyester blend.

Microplastics are considered so bad because they can block the digestive tract of some aquatic wildlife and because they can release toxins into the environment.

Tasks

Activity 1 (2 Minutes and 56 seconds)
Short video on microplastics – Ocean Confetti!

Activity 2 (20 minutes)
Looking under a microscope for microplastics

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Activity/Process

Prep

- Cut small pieces of plastic bag, fishing line, nylon, and a plastic sheet.
- Collect microplastic beads from facewash.
- Collect soil.
- Put soil in petri dishes.
- Put pieces of microplastics into the soil of each of the petri dishes.
- Put out eight different dissecting microscopes.
- Gave the kids each a pair of dissecting tweezers.
- The kids each take turns looking through the microscope and picking through the soil sample for microplastics.

Resources

Video from MinuteEarth at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVoFeELi_vQ