

Man dives to bottom of ocean. Finds plastic.

An American millionaire has completed the deepest-ever, solo dive, exploring the mysteries of the Mariana Trench – where he found a plastic bag. Can we turn the tide of plastic pollution?



Going down: The submarine, called DSV Limiting Factor, cost around \$48 million to build.

The **Mariana Trench** is the deepest natural trench in the world. It is found in the Pacific Ocean, and it is deeper than Mount Everest is tall.

That did nothing to put off American explorer **Victor Vescovo**. Earlier this month, he went 10,927m into the trench in a submarine. It was the world's deepest-ever, solo submarine dive.

While he was there, he spotted a plastic bag and several sweet wrappers. "Unfortunately, the presence of man finds its way even to these extraordinarily remote places," he told *The Times*.

About **eight million tons** of plastic finds its way into the oceans each year. In 2017, David Attenborough's documentary series *Blue*

Planet II highlighted the damage this does to sea creatures.

But yesterday, the TV presenter warned about the findings of a **new report** which focuses on the human impact of plastic. It found that plastic pollution is killing up to one million people every year, mostly in the world's poorest countries.

This is because they often do not have the means to dispose of plastic waste safely. So, it often ends up in the environment. It blocks drains and causes flooding. In places with poor sanitation, this can spread diseases like cholera.

Then, there is air pollution. If plastic is not thrown away, it is often burned. This gives off harmful, toxic fumes.

Last straw?

What can we do? There has been a huge push to reduce plastic use in the UK. A plastic straw ban is planned for later this year. Is it on us, as individuals, to keep reducing our plastic use to the absolute minimum?

Or is that just a drop in the (poisoned) ocean? "We need leadership from those who are responsible for introducing plastic to countries where it cannot be adequately managed," says Attenborough. In other words, it is companies who must finally put the planet above their profits.

Q & A

Q: What do we know?

A: Plastic pollution is harming poor communities in more subtle ways too. For

example, when fish or animals have ingested too much plastic, it is bad for their health. This has a knock-on impact on those who rely on the animals for food.

Q: What do we not know?

A: Whether the world can tackle the problem. There is currently no known way to retrieve large amounts of plastic from the ocean.

YOU DECIDE

Should plastic be banned outright?

ACTIVITIES

Imagine you have five minutes to interview Victor Vescovo about his record-breaking dive. What three questions would you ask him?

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"If we damage the natural world, we damage ourselves."
David Attenborough

WHAT DO YOU THINK?



WORD WATCH

Mariana Trench – A crescent-shaped dip in the Earth's crust, below the Pacific Ocean. The trench is about 11km (seven miles) deep, and 2,550km (1,585 miles) long.

Victor Vescovo – A pony-tailed explorer with a US Navy background, who made his fortune as a private equity investor. His expedition, called Five Deeps, is being documented for the *Discovery Channel*.

Eight million tons – According to the United

Nations (UN).

New report – The report was carried out by the charities Tearfund, Fauna & Flora International and WasteAid.



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Notes

