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ENGL-150

Paper 2

Picture millions of gallons of oil spilling into the Mexican Gulf, killing marine life and destroying habitats in a matter of seconds. This picture depicts the 2010 BP oil spill, “the largest marine related spill in the Oil and Gas industry” (“BP oil spill”). This oil spill is widely known throughout the world and has impacted the gulf in a devastating way. The oil from the explosion “stimulated the erosion of land thereby leading to the destruction of a majority of the marsh vegetation” (“BP oil spill”). Not only did it impact the land, but it caused “eleven (human) deaths and seventeen (human) injuries” (“BP oil spill”). It also caused a significant number of mutated fish to arise in the area, most likely from the chemicals used to clean up the gulf. These are just the repercussions of one major oil spill. There have been hundreds of oil spills all over the world. If we, as humans, don’t start taking a stand against ocean pollution, the consequences could be drastic.

While there are a number of toxic items that could be harmful to the marine life in the ocean, plastic has by far caused the most damage: “Plastic pollution affects at least seven hundred marine species, while some estimates suggest that at least a hundred million marine mammals are killed each year from plastic pollution” (“How Ocean Pollution”). The problem with plastic is that it’s everywhere. It’s in bottles, straws, bags, packaging of beverages, and more. The more we litter, the more animals suffer. “Plastic kills fish, birds, marine animals and sea turtles, destroys habitats and even affects’ animals mating rituals, which can have devastating consequences and can wipe out entire species” (“How Ocean Pollution”). Oftentimes, you’ll see pictures online of marine animals who have gotten stuck in plastic and can no longer swim. In the majority of cases, marine animals either “get entangled in or ingest plastic litter” (Derraik 842). These stories are heartbreaking, and the human race is completely at fault. The reason plastic is so detrimental to marine life is due to the amount of time it takes to decompose. “Those (plastic litter) that are buoyant remain suspended at the sea surface for a long time, and those that are not, sink and remain on the bottom for years or even decades” (Laist 319).

Underwater organisms aren’t the only populations affected by the phenomenon of ocean pollution, humans are taking a hard hit as well. While humans, knowingly or unknowingly, are the cause of this detrimental concern, we are also a target. What humans put in the oceans are what fish and other organisms end up eating. Therefore, when humans go to a seafood restaurant and order something, it could be contaminated with any pollutants WE have released into their habitats: “Chemicals such as pesticides, lead, and other heavy metals found in polluted water can contaminate water supplies and food chains through the marine life which can cause hormonal, reproductive, nervous system, or kidney problems in humans” (“How Ocean Pollution”). Bacteria can also cause a number of problems up the food chain, leading to “Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s, or heart disease in humans” (“How Ocean Pollution”). However, you don’t have to ingest seafood to experience the wrath of ocean pollution: “Pollution on the beach can cause severe reactions and illnesses through physical contact or through ingesting the water, leading to stomach aches, diarrhea, or rashes” (“How Ocean Pollution”). The possibilities are endless. Not only are humans hurting marine life through ocean pollution, but we’re hurting ourselves as well.

So why are oceans so important? “Oceans cover over seventy two percent of the planet’s surface, provide over ninety seven percent of the world’s water supply and over seventy percent of the oxygen we breathe” (“How Ocean Pollution”). They are obviously essential for all life on this planet. Oceans also do a lot to help control global warming. “Oceans act as a massive sponge, soaking up more than a quarter of the CO2 humans pump into the atmosphere” (“How Ocean Pollution”). With the effect global warming is having on our country currently, we need oceans now more than ever. But more importantly, we need to take better care of our oceans. There’s no excuse for polluting this “magical, diverse, and abundant ecosystem that mankind needs in order to survive” (“How Ocean Pollution”). It’s easy enough to walk to a trashcan, there’s plenty provided on the beach. There’s simply no justification.

In order to keep the environment safe, the government established the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) back in 1970. The agency’s job involves “setting and enforcing standards to safeguard the land, air, and water as well as protect human health” (Trethan). They also develop and enforce acts that help keep the environment safe for all organisms and must be followed by all forms of government. In addition to the extensive research and data the agency collects in regard to the environment, they also “publish a great deal of information for public and industrial education about protecting the environment and limiting the impact of people and their activities” (Trethan). Basically, the EPA’s main job is to reverse years of negligence on the government’s behalf regarding our planet and ensure that each and every individual protects the Earth. It sounds like the EPA is pretty fundamentally important, right? Well, unfortunately, not everyone feels this way. After the recent 2017 presidential election, the budget for the EPA has dropped significantly. In fact, the new plan “eliminates more than fifty programs and three thousand two hundred jobs, (in addition to) discontinuing funding for international climate-change programs” (“What Trump Cut”). With the current state of the environment, it seems senseless to “dismantle the EPA, shrink its funding by thirty one percent and eliminate a fifth of its workforce” (“What Trump Cut”). But, for some unknown reason, that’s what our government has decided is best. They’d rather spend the money on hotel rooms for federal employees than saving our planet. This just further illustrates how essential the individual is in saving our oceans. While there may not be one vast solution to reducing ocean pollution, the more practical solution may lie in the hands of your average joe.

There are ten, somewhat simple ways the average individual can help save the oceans.

Number One: “Mind your carbon footprint and reduce energy consumption” (“10 Things”). This consists of leaving your car at home every once in a while, and riding a bike or walking. Grab some more blankets during the winter and don’t touch your thermostat. Maybe even switch to compact fluorescent lightbulbs. There’s a million ways to use less energy, pick and choose how you want to do it.

Number Two: “Make safe, sustainable seafood choices” (“10 Things”). If you’re going to eat seafood, do it responsibly. Be conscious of what species are on the endangered or threatened list and don’t order them. Also, speak up to the manager of the restaurant and tell them they shouldn’t serve those species. Instead, try to dine on a species that’s high in abundance and low on the food chain.

Number Three: “Use fewer plastic products” (“10 Things”). Most people have already been introduced to the dangers of plastic products to marine life. Instead of continuing to use them, try carrying a reusable water bottle, buying non-disposable containers, or even reusing the same grocery bags. Each of these acts will significantly lower the amount of plastic polluting the ocean, and simultaneously save thousands of marine life animals.

Number Four: “Help take care of the beach” (“10 Things”). Make sure you always clean up after yourself whenever you’re at the beach, otherwise your trash could get blown around until it reaches the ocean, and by then the damage is done. Also, when exploring wildlife in the ocean, be careful and respectful, don’t interfere with anything to the point of impairment. In addition to all of this, participate in local beach cleanups, it’s easy to register and look for opportunities.

Number Five: “Don’t purchase items that exploit marine life” (“10 Things”). Avoid buying any items in beach shops like shell or coral bracelets or shark products etcetera. By buying these products, you are basically condoning the coarse actions taken to put them on the shelf.

Number Six: “Be an ocean-friendly pet owner” (“10 Things”). If you own a fish, never release it into the ocean. It’s an unknown environment that could be harmful to the fish, or to the pre-existing fish in the environment

Number Seven: “Support organizations working to protect the ocean” (“10 Things”). Go out of your way to join/support any national/local institutions or organizations dedicated to helping the oceans. The ten ocean conservation groups thought to be making the biggest impacts for their cause as of 2012 are listed as follows: “blue ocean institute, Oceana, sea shepherd conservation society, Greenpeace, ocean conservancy, woods hole oceanographic institution, blue frontier campaign, Scripps institute of oceanography, marine fish conservation network, and deep-sea conservation coalition” (“10 Ocean”). Visit any of these organizations’ websites to start making a change!

Number Eight: “Influence change in your community” (“10 Things”). Research the ocean policies of the individuals up for election before you vote, that way you can vote according to your beliefs. For example, President Trump significantly defunded the EPA, therefore you could conclude that a lot of other things are more important to him than the conservation of our environment/oceans. So, if you’re very passionate about this subject, he’s probably not someone you should vote for.

Number Nine: “Travel the ocean responsibly” (“10 Things”). When riding in a boat, never throw anything overboard. Be aware of the marine life around you. Also, when taking a cruise, make sure you research the safest and eco-friendliest option possible.

Number Ten: “Educate yourself about oceans and marine life” (“10 Things”). The more you educate yourself about the environment and the oceans, the more you’ll want to help save them! And just as importantly, you’ll want to tell others about it as well.

While these ten solutions may not seem like much in the grand scheme of things, if every individual takes these actions then a significant change would have been made. Because if we don’t change something fast, we’re at risk of ruining the oceans for future generations. “There are a hundred sixty-one endangered and threatened marine life species” as of right now, who knows how many more there could be in the next decade if humans continue to pollute the water. (“Endangered and Threatened”). Humans have been taking oceans for granted for decades now, and it’s finally catching up to us. “Oceans are fundamental to the health of our planet – the very lifeblood of earth’s ecosystem. To survive and prosper, mankind needs a harmonious relationship with our planet’s oceans” (“How Ocean Pollution”). When are we going to start acting like it?

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