Daily News

Environment UK News 2nd October 2019

Women and Girls Promise to Cut Single-Use Plastic

Photo: Plastic waste is a big problem.

Why is plastic pollution such a problem?

- **Plastic is not always biodegradable and it takes hundreds of years to break down.**
- **WWF, an environmental organisation, says its a big problem as sea animals can mistake it for food and they say 100,000 sea mammals die every year.**

Around half a million girls and young women are making a plastic promise. Girlguiding wants its members to reduce the number of single-use plastics they use.

Members will promise to take action by drinking from reusable bottles and coffee cups. Other action they will pledge to do include using reusable boxes instead of cling film.

Girlguiding also wants its members to speak out about cutting plastic waste. They can make the plastic promise on Girlguiding's website.

So what is the problem with plastic pollution? Plastic is not always biodegradable and takes hundreds of years to decompose. A lot of it ends up in our oceans, where animals can mistake it for food and eat it.

Other animals can get trapped in the plastic. This can lead to animals dying. WWF, an environmental charity, says that 100,000 marine mammals are killed and a million birds die annually from plastic waste.

Other news has shown that plastic is having a big impact on our environment. Microplastics have even been found in Arctic snow! These tiny pieces of plastic broke off from larger pieces of plastic and they travel through the air.

Governments are now taking action on single-use plastics. In May, the UK government announced that they will mostly ban plastic straws, cotton buds and drink stirrers from April 2020. According to the government, the UK uses nearly five billion plastic straws and nearly two billion plastic cotton buds each year!

There are exemptions for people with medical needs or disability as other alternatives are sometimes not safe.

Scientists have also sought solutions to this problem. Some ideas have been pretty ingenious!

Last year, Pontus Törnqvist invented potato plastic. It can be used for plastic straws and forks. It decomposes after only a few months.

While today's story shows that plastic pollution is a problem, it's a positive move that lots of people are taking action to tackle it.

Glossary

biodegrabable	Capable of being decomposed by bacteria.
decompose	To rot naturally.
annually	Something that occurs once a year.
exemptions	The fact of not having a law apply to something.

Questions

1. Plastic pollution is a big problem. Find and copy a piece of evidence that shows this.

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2. Which idea for reducing the use of single-use plastics do you think will be the easiest for people to follow? Explain your answer.

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3. Do you think many people will buy items made from potato plastic? Explain your answer.

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4. 'Some ideas have been pretty ingenious!'
   Tick the word that is closest in meaning to 'ingenious'.
   - ○ boring
   - ○ clever
   - ○ unoriginal
   - ○ useful

5. Why do you think people are taking the promise online instead of writing it on paper?

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6. Summarise the story in 20 words or fewer.

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7. Find a phrase that shows the author thinks it's good news that people are dealing with plastic pollution.

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Answers

1. Plastic pollution is a big problem. Find and copy a piece of evidence that shows this.
   WWF, an environmental charity, says that 100,000 marine mammals are killed and a million birds die annually from plastic waste.

2. Which idea for reducing the use of single-use plastics do you think will be the easiest for people to follow? Explain your answer.
   Accept any reasonable answer which refers to the story, e.g. I think bringing a reusable bottle will be the easiest for people to follow as most people will have a bottle they can use.

3. Do you think many people will buy items made from potato plastic? Explain your answer.
   Accept any reasonable answer which refers to the story, e.g. I think people will buy potato plastic because it can be used as forks and straws and could be used to tackle plastic pollution.

4. 'Some ideas have been pretty ingenious!'
   Tick the word that is closest in meaning to 'ingenious'.
   - ○ boring
   - ✓ **clever**
   - ○ unoriginal
   - ○ useful

5. Why do you think people are taking the promise online instead of writing it on paper?
   Accept any reasonable answer which refers to the story, e.g. I think people are taking the promise online as this could be better for the environment.

6. Summarise the story in 20 words or fewer.
   Accept any reasonable summary which refers to the story, e.g. Girlguiding is asking its members to take a promise to cut the amount of single-use plastic they use.

7. Find a phrase that shows the author thinks it's good news that people are dealing with plastic pollution.
   It's a postive move that lots of people are taking action to tackle it.