



## eChapter 3

# Our Ocean

There's only one ocean, and we're all connected to it, directly or indirectly, for our seafood, climate, weather, recreational opportunities, transoceanic distribution of materials and products, and much more.

### ***The Flood of Plastics***

The world's largest dump is a slowly rotating mass of trash-laden water about twice the size of Texas, located on the surface of the Pacific Ocean between San Francisco and Hawaii. Known as the Eastern Garbage Patch, this long-lasting floating disaster is part of a system of currents called the North Pacific subtropical gyre, slowly circulating clockwise. The massive mess of the Eastern Garbage Patch is only one of a dozen giant gyres of floating trash in the ocean.

Nearly 90% of floating marine litter is durable plastic materials such as polyethylene and polypropylene, Styrofoam, nylon, and saran. Most of it starts on land, floats into storm drains during storm run-off, then accumulates in rivers, and floats to the ocean.

**FACT:** The average American used 223 pounds of plastic in 2001. The plastics industry expects per-capita usage to increase to 326 pounds by the end of this decade. [\[source\]](#)

- The United Nations Environment Program estimates that 46,000 pieces of plastic litter are floating on **every square mile** of the ocean's surface worldwide. [\[source\]](#)
- An estimated 1 million seabirds choke or get tangled in plastic nets or other debris every year. About 100,000 seals, sea lions, whales, dolphins, other marine mammals and sea turtles suffer the same fate.