

# HOW DOES MARINE LITTER AFFECT WILDLIFE & ECOSYSTEMS?

## Entanglement /entrapment

Animals are attracted to litter items due to their natural curiosity or while in search of food or shelter. Entanglement /entrapment may not necessarily cause death but torturous pain... when the animal does not grow normally, or while the litter item becomes embedded in the animal's flesh as it grows around it.

## "Ghost fishing"

The so-called "ghost nets" are accidentally lost or deliberately discarded fishing nets that continue to catch fish as they keep on drifting in the sea or along the bottom, often for very long periods. Their "catch" attracts other fish, mammals and sea birds searching for food, which are often caught or entangled in them, causing a vicious lethal circle.

## Ingestion

Fish, birds and mammals may swallow a litter item accidentally or because it resembles their prey. For example, turtles eat plastic bags mistaking them for jellyfish; birds feed on or feed their young with plastic pellets, mistaking them for fish eggs or crabs, etc. Ingestion can lead to starvation or malnutrition if the ingested items fill up their stomach. Sharp objects, e.g. metal and broken glass, can wound the digestive tract and cause infection and pain. Ingested items may also block the animal's air passage, and eventually cause its death by suffocation.

## Bio-accumulation

Birds of prey and other carnivorous animals have been found with large concentrations of e.g. plastics in their stomachs after preying on smaller birds that previously ingested fish with these plastics in them... Marine organisms are also exposed to toxics released from litter items. These toxics either have a direct effect or bio-accumulate in other animals feeding on them.

For humans who are at the top of the food chain, the consequences are yet unknown.