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WORLD NEWS

Plastic contamination ‘killing the human race’

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New research uncovers microplastics in every corner of the planet



Hannah Peters/Getty Images

A team competing in the Volvo Ocean Race took seawater samples throughout their 45,000-mile journey

Plastic contamination will have a “catastrophic” effect on human health unless urgent action is taken, according to experts.

The warning comes as analysis of seawater collected during the Volvo Ocean Race, an extreme round-the-world sailing event, “proved conclusively that plastic pollution has spread to every part of the planet”, says [Sky News](#).

What is plastic contamination?

Recent studies have revealed the unprecedented extent to which the Earth’s waters are polluted with microplastics, defined as plastic debris less than 5mm in length. Oceans are awash with plastic, and recent studies have shown that microplastic contamination is also present in tap and bottled water.

What does the latest study show?

Seawater samples collected by a yacht taking part in the 45,000-mile Volvo Ocean Race revealed that tiny fibres of plastic can be found almost everywhere.

The highest readings were taken close to big population areas, with 349 particles per cubic metre of seawater in the South China Sea close to Hong Kong. Even in the remotest parts of the Southern Ocean, hundreds of miles from land, the researchers found 26 particles per cubic metre.

How will this affect humans?

Dr Luiza Mirpuri, co-founder of the Portugal-based environmental organisation Mirpuri Foundation, warns that plastic contamination is slowly “killing the human race”.

What do other experts say?

“Other scientists are more measured in their conclusions,” notes Sky News. However, there are growing concerns about the microplastics consumed by fish, which are then eaten by humans.

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Dr Malcolm Hudson, environmental scientist at Southampton University, told Sky News: “We actually don’t know the extent of the risk at the moment.

“There will come a point where there will be so much plastic in the ocean that we will be facing hazards that could be endangering human life.”

Professor Alex Rogers, a specialist in sustainable oceans at Oxford University, told [The Guardian](#) earlier this month: “Many of these chemicals are pretty nasty and as they move up the food chain they may be having serious consequences for the health of wildlife, and ultimately humans.”

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