

Nurdles: The invisible threat

What are nurdles?

Nurdles are small plastic pellets that are used as the raw material to create almost all plastic products. They are about the size of a lentil, and billions of these pellets are produced and shipped all over the world every year. It is estimated that about 230 000 tonnes of nurdles, which does not biodegrade, are accidentally spilled into the ocean every year.

Nurdles are mistaken for food by fish, turtles, and seabirds who's digestive systems cannot process this plastic pieces. Eventually, the animals' stomachs are filled with these plastic pieces, and they stop eating and die of starvation.



Nurdle pollution in South Africa

In South Africa, nurdles accumulating on beaches have mainly been attributed to two large incidents:

- In 2017 a shipping container fell overboard in the Durban Harbour, spilling about 49 tonnes (2.2 billion nurdles) of nurdles into the surrounding ocean.
- In 2020 an accident caused the loss of containers with nurdles from a ship *en route* to the Port of Ngqura in Coega, Eastern Cape.

The Great Global Nurdle Hunt

How to take part in the Great Global Nurdle Hunt:

1. Go to a beach
2. Search for nurdles
3. Record the time you searched for, how many people took part, and how many nurdles you found. If you could not find any nurdles this is also an important result to note and submit.
4. Submit your results to <https://www.nurdlehunt.org.uk/take-part/submit-your-finds.html>

CAN YOU FIND ALL 20 NURDLES IN THIS PHOTO?



Approved 7/12/2021

Swart
E Swart: Scientific Manager

Compiled by the Environmental Research and Development (ERD) Unit, November 2021.