**THINK YOU’RE DOING YOUR**

**PART BY RECYCLING?**

Think again: Much of the plastic dropped in recycling bins isn’t even recycled. In 2014, 22% of PET plastic collected for recycling was exported out of the United States. Why? Our facilities can’t keep up: Plastic production surged from 15 million tons in 1964 to 311 tons in 2014—an increase of more than 2,000 percent.

**Currently, 300 million tons of new plastic is produced yearly—less than 10% is recycled.**

As oil prices fluctuate, so too does the price of plastic. When those markets are depressed, virgin plastic becomes far cheaper to buy than recycled. Plus many plastic products degrade each time they’re processed—unlike metal or glass, which can be perpetually recycled—making them progressively less valuable.

Without a profitable market in which to sell it, it’s not cost-effective for many recycling companies to process plastic—so they sell it to other countries at a loss. In 2011, China imported nearly half of America’s plastic waste.

In countries like India, waste pickers sort through the trash to find the pieces that are most valuable—thicker plastics and metals. The remainder becomes landfilled or incinerated, creating a health crisis for communities. Local waterways act like conveyor belts, sending plastic straight out to sea.

**8 MILLION METRIC TONS OF PLASTIC ENTER THE OCEAN EACH YEAR.**

Where does it all go? Most plastic are made from petroleum and built to last—some for thousands of years. In the ocean, sun and waves break down most plastics into small microparticles, which never truly biodegrade. The result? [**5 Gyres led research that found there is an estimated 5.25 trillion particles of “plastic smog” weighing in at 270,000 tons in our oceans worldwide.**](http://www.5gyres.org/5-gyres-by-the-numbers/)

Once in the water, microplastics attract persistent organic pollutants like flame retardants and other industrial chemicals linked to human health problems—even cancer. They can be one million times more toxic than the water around them. [These pollutants can work their way up the food chain—and onto our plates.](http://www.5gyres.org/animals/) Meanwhile, to reduce the amount of plastic that you contribute to the problem, pledge to go **#plasticfree**: ***Refuse the top 5 sources of single use plastic: bags, water bottles, to go containers, takeaway cups and straws.***