

# 1.6 Billion Disposable Masks Entered Our Oceans in 2020

By [Zero Hedge](#)

Global Research, August 02, 2021

[Zero Hedge](#) 30 July 2021

Theme: [Environment](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the “Translate Website” drop down menu on the top banner of our home page (Desktop version).

Visit and follow us on Instagram at [@crg\\_globalresearch](#).

\*\*\*

*Following the World Health Organization’s formal declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the world quickly mandated the use of face masks in public spaces.*

This led to a massive demand shock, prompting factories to begin producing disposable masks at full capacity. The majority of these masks were produced in China, and in April 2020, the country reported a staggering [daily production](#) figure of 450 million masks.

Plastic Pollution: A Lesser Known Side Effect

In Ocean Asia’s 2020 report, [Masks on the Beach](#), researchers developed a formula to provide reasonable estimates for the number of disposable masks entering the environment.

Given an annual production figure of 52 billion disposable masks and a loss rate of 3% (the percentage of masks that escape water management systems), [Visual Capitalist’s Marcus Lu notes](#) that the team concluded that nearly 1.6 billion face masks wound up in our oceans in 2020. This amounts to approximately 5,500 tons of plastic pollution.



These masks are commonly made of polypropylene, which easily breaks up into microplastics. While the effects of microplastics on human health are not yet determined, these fragments are incredibly common in our water supply - for example, [94% of U.S. tap water](#) is deemed to be contaminated.

### Disposable Doesn't Mean They're Gone

Despite their single-use nature, disposable masks are expected to take more than four centuries to decompose while in the ocean. Here's how this compares to other items we use on a day-to-day basis.

Item	Years Needed to Biodegrade
Disposable masks	450
Disposable diaper	450
Plastic bottle	450
Aluminum can	200
Styrofoam cup	50
Plastic grocery bag	20
Cigarette butt	10

The pandemic has extended well into 2021, and the number of disposable masks polluting our oceans is likely to continue growing.

With this in mind, various companies and organizations are beginning to search for a solution. One noteworthy example is Plaxtil, which is [developing a method](#) for recycling surgical masks so that the raw materials can be used for other products.

\*

Note to readers: Please click the share buttons above or below. Follow us on Instagram, @crg\_globalresearch. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

The original source of this article is [Zero Hedge](#)  
Copyright © [Zero Hedge](#), [Zero Hedge](#), 2021

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Zero Hedge](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)