



© Daniel Müller / Greenpeace

GREENPEACE TOOLKIT Plastic Clean-Up & Brand Audit

The Story

Healthy oceans are the life support system for our planet, providing 97 percent of the Earth's livable habitat and a home to more than 700,000 species. The oceans are vital to human health as well, providing jobs, enjoyment and food to billions of people. Half of the oxygen we breathe is generated by our oceans.

But right now, our oceans are in more trouble than ever before. It is estimated that up to 12 million metric tons of plastic – everything from plastic bottles and bags to microbeads – ends up in our oceans each year. That's a truckload of trash every minute.

Traveling on ocean currents, this plastic is now turning up in every corner of our planet – from Florida beaches to uninhabited Pacific islands. It is even being found trapped in Arctic ice. Our oceans are slowly turning into a plastic soup, and the effects on ocean life are chilling. Discarded plastic fishing lines trap and entangle turtles and seabirds, and plastic pieces of all sizes choke and clog the stomachs of creatures who mistake it for food, from tiny zooplankton to whales. Plastic is now entering every level of the ocean food chain and is even ending up in the seafood on our plates.

What's going on?!

We've all seen evidence of plastic pollution in our communities and environment, and many of us have taken action to do something about it. Too often, though, we tell stories about plastic pollution that don't really represent the big picture. When we collect trash on a beach, it's easy to blame a careless person who just didn't care enough to dispose of their waste properly. But should the issue end there? Is all the plastic pollution in our oceans, streams, parks and neighborhoods there because of careless individuals—or is there something bigger going on?

At Greenpeace, we think *systems* play a larger role than *individuals*. Why is it that something intended to be used for minutes is packaged in something that lasts forever? Large corporations rely on single-use plastic packaging because it benefits them as producers of goods: single-use means more consumption and ease for the purchaser, so it's a win-win if you're looking to turn a profit without care for plastic pollution's devastating impacts.

But it doesn't have to be this way.



Greenpeace is already working hard to protect our oceans, but we need people power to win the fight.

Here's where YOU come in!

To think big about plastic pollution and hold these large corporations accountable, we need your help. We need volunteers around the country to host clean-ups in their communities, and then record whose plastic products you find in a brand audit.

That's right. We need you to tell us what sort of plastic pollution you're finding in your communities, so that we can present the data and hold these big companies accountable. In this toolkit you'll find all the tips you need to hold a successful clean-up and brand audit, because we can't do this without you. To tackle plastic pollution, it's going to take all of us.

The Mission

We're demanding that corporations take responsibility for the plastic pollution crisis and end the use of destructive single-use plastics and packaging. Our oceans are not a dump.

Fortunately, we are within reach of a world that respects our oceans, their inhabitants and the people who depend on them. We see a world that is safe and healthy with vibrant oceans.

Ready to dive in?

Getting Started

- First, add your name to our [petition](#) and share it with your friends. We need all the people-power we can get to demand that big corporations do their part to end plastic pollution! Every voice counts.
- Next, do a bit of research. Is there an area in your community that is most heavily affected by plastic pollution? Where would your cleanup make the most impact?
- Invite others to join you! Friends, family members, classmates, colleagues, neighbors - everyone is affected by plastic pollution, so spread the word to anyone who will listen!

Checklist: 7 Tips for a Successful Clean-Up



1. **Make a plan:** Pick where you want to conduct your clean-up and brand audit, be it a beach, local waterway, park, hiking trail or your neighborhood.
2. **Gather the necessary supplies:** Make sure you're wearing gloves and have a receptacle to collect the trash. Thick gardening gloves work well, as do buckets, and recycled paper bags from the grocery store.
3. **Invite your friends:** You can certainly head out into your neighbor on your own, or you can call five of your closest friends and find a time to take a walk and collect some plastic pollution. Auditing what you collected will also be easier with more hands and eyes!
4. **Begin your clean-up:** Set a timer for 30 minutes and see how much you can pick up. You might be surprised by how much you are able to remove in such a short time. To make the auditing portion easier, think about pre-sorting what you pick-up, grouping plastic items together.
5. **Carry out your brand audit:** While still wearing your gloves, sort through the plastic items and make a note of the brand and item type. For example, if you find a Diet Coke bottle cap, you would note that you found a bottle cap from the Coke brand. (See more details on auditing below!) Please note that for this audit, we are collecting information about plastic waste only.
6. **Dispose of what you cleaned up properly:** Pre-sorting the items will make this step much easier. Be sure to dispose of compostable and organic matter appropriately, if you have access to compostable or green waste disposal. Landfill items you collected should be disposed of in a trash bin or dumpster depending on the waste management in your area. As for the plastic items and other recyclable items collected, adhere to your area's recycling guidelines.
7. **Share your hard work with the world and expose plastic pollution:** Take a photo of the results of your clean-up and brand audit. Specifically, photograph all the plastic pollution you collected, and share it on Instagram with #breakfreefromplastic. We at Greenpeace would like to regram your hard work, and use the photos as a part of our global campaign to fight plastic pollution.

How to conduct the brand audit:

Corporations like Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestle, Unilever, Starbucks, Procter & Gamble, and McDonald's all have a huge role to play when it comes to plastic pollution. We are sold coffee, soda, chips, candy, sandwiches, shampoo, face wash, and soap contained in plastic that we have no choice but to throw away. It is time for these corporations to invest in alternatives and phase out single-use plastic. We want to determine which corporations have contributed to plastic pollution, and that's why we need your help auditing the plastic waste you collect.

We have created a simple online form where you can report all the vital information we need to get the most useful information from these audits. Click [here](#) to fill it out!

1. **Identify categories.** What kind of plastic trash items are you finding? (Examples: bottles, bags, cups, cutlery, caps, lids, straws, stirrers, etc.)



2. What is the **brand** labeled on this item? (Hint: This will be the most visible word printed on the item!)
For the plastic bottle you see here, the brand would be Fanta.

3. Who is the **manufacturer** of that brand? (Hint: This will be in smaller print in a less obvious place.)
For the plastic Fanta bottle above, the manufacturer would be Coca-Cola.

For examples, these are all Coca-Cola brands.



Other large manufacturers like [Unilever](#), [Nestle](#), and [Proctor & Gamble](#) each have hundreds of brands. A quick online search should reveal the manufacturer of your plastic item, if you have trouble finding it on the label.

Wrapping Up:

- Once you've taken some photos of your group and disposed of your waste appropriately, thank everyone for joining you. This brand audit connects us on a national level - thank you for being a part of our national community of concerned citizens working together to protect our coasts, climate, and communities!
- Suggest ways for people to stay in touch with you and Greenpeace through [Greenwire](#), our social network for environmental activists like you!
- Keep learning! Our plastics expert recommends this [short, informative documentary](#), but there are tons of great books, articles, online courses, and other ways of learning more about plastics - and how to move beyond them.
- Spread the word! Share this toolkit far and wide, and invite others to help us build a better future free from plastic.