



Key Issues

# Action on Plastics

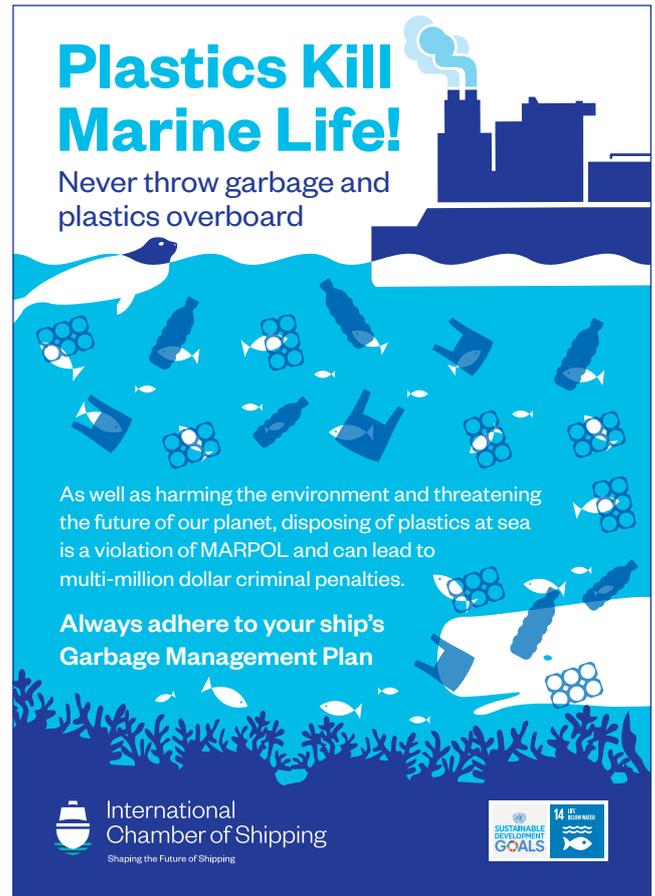
Garbage dumped at sea can actually be as harmful as oil or chemicals. Plastics in particular can take years to degrade, and fish and other marine life can easily confuse plastics with food. As well as doing great harm to marine life and threatening biodiversity, dangerous toxins can enter the food chain, ultimately being consumed by humans.

The vast majority of plastic found at sea originates from land. Most of it is washed into the ocean by rivers and, according to the World Economic Forum, 90% of it comes from just ten of them. Nevertheless, although the problem of plastic litter from merchant ships is negligible, the shipping industry has a special responsibility to play its part in eliminating any pollution of the ocean.

The provisions of Annex V of the MARPOL Convention, which are strictly enforced worldwide, already mean it is no longer permitted for any merchant ship to dispose of garbage at sea because of the damaging effects on the marine environment. The generation of ship's garbage including plastic must therefore be minimised, recycling should be undertaken as a matter of course, and discharge to port reception facilities must always be the norm.

In October 2018, IMO adopted an Action Plan to enhance existing regulations and introduce new measures to further prevent the possibility of plastic litter from ships. To support this initiative, ICS has published a new edition of its Guidance for the Preparation and Implementation of Garbage Management Plans. This second edition is intended to help shipping companies comply with the latest requirements of MARPOL Annex V regarding the treatment and disposal of garbage.

Being illegal under MARPOL, marine plastic litter from merchant ships is actually very rare. However, modern products commonly use materials which persist in the marine environment and therefore require special processing before disposal on shore. An essential feature, therefore, of the current IMO MARPOL regime is the



requirement for ships to prepare and implement Garbage Management Plans. The new edition of the ICS Guidance updates advice on best practice in line with the most recent changes to MARPOL Annex V. These have expanded the scope of the regulations by broadening the definition of what constitutes garbage and introducing a general prohibition of its discharge into the sea.

This revised ICS guidance is timely as new attention is given to the negative impacts of plastics on the health of the world's oceans. This has been given impetus by the widely acclaimed BBC documentary series 'Blue Planet', and the high level UN Ocean Conference in 2017 – at which ICS represented shipowners – in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 14) for the protection of the ocean. ICS has further restated shipowner support for SDG 14 as part of the new UN Global Compact's 'Sustainable Ocean Business Action Platform', attending a major launch event in New York held during the UN General Assembly in September 2018.





The revised ICS Guidance is intended to provide those with responsibility for developing mandatory Garbage Management Plans with a better understanding of the intentions behind the IMO MARPOL requirements, to enable effective implementation and full compliance.

Any incident involving the illegal dumping of garbage may result in criminal convictions and heavy fines. This in turn may severely damage a company's reputation and impact its commercial performance. Ignorance of the regulations is no defence. If a ship and its crew are seen to pose a risk of marine pollution, the vessel can be detained by Port State Control until any deficiencies are corrected.

It is a fundamental requirement of MARPOL that IMO Member States should provide adequate facilities for the reception of waste from ships calling at their ports and terminals. However, the quality and availability of reception facilities worldwide is inconsistent. Indeed some developed countries actually provide poorer facilities than their developing nation counterparts, or offer services based on varying tariff structures which often do not encourage their use.

The new ICS Guidelines therefore emphasise the important need for ships to report inadequate reception facilities to their flag administration so that reports can be communicated to IMO. The issue of reception facilities is also a key issue which needs to be taken forward as part of the IMO Action Plan on plastics.

