

Turtle Threats: Water Pollution

Turtles are vulnerable to a range of threats because:

- When baby turtles are born they are on their own; their mothers aren't around to care for them or teach them how to avoid threats.
- They don't begin breeding until they are about 30 to 40 years old (depending on the species).
- Development and lighting along the coast disturb turtles that need to nest on or close to the same beach that they originally hatched on, and stop the hatchlings from being able to find the ocean.
- Their gender is dependent on the temperature of the sand in which the eggs are hatched: the warmer the sand, the more females will be born. This means that climate change, which will raise temperatures around the globe, could result in too many female turtles and not enough males.
- They make long migrations. Spending so much time travelling in the water means that they are exposed to more impacts, as turtles may travel from safe waters to waters that are full of dangers such as fishing nets, boats or marine debris. They have poor hearing and sight when above the surface of the water. This means boats often hit them.
- There are a range of threats to nesting beaches and nests, including predators, people, vehicles, varying temperatures, and flooding or natural erosion (washing nests away).



How does water pollution threaten turtles?

- Fertilisers, oil, petrol and chemicals used on land can pollute the ocean. These pollutants travel along waterways – such as drains, creeks and rivers – until they end up in the ocean.
- Pollution of the ocean also occurs through deliberate or accidental dumping at sea. This includes major oil and chemical spills.
- Water pollution affects the foods that turtles eat. By eating polluted food, the pollution gets into the turtles and makes them sick, too.
- Water pollution can also cause skin growths, eye infections or other diseases. Recent studies have found that turtles can ingest thousands of man-made chemicals, including many we can't even identify, and it may be making the turtles unwell and causing skin growths.



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Once you have read through this information, you will need to work in your groups to create a poster or presentation to share with the other people in your class. You will need to undertake the research necessary to find out the answers to the following points and then include this information in your poster or presentation:

- A description of the threat
- How this threat affects turtles
- Where this threat occurs
- The particular species of turtle that is/are affected



In addition, pick one of the following questions to answer:

- What is something we can all do to help prevent the pollution of our oceans?
- What is something you are already doing to help prevent the pollution of our oceans?
- What is one thing that you found interesting or important about water pollution and/or turtles that you want to share with the class?

Work in your groups to create a poster or presentation to share the information you have found.

Some places to get information about marine turtles:

- WWF - Green Turtle and Hawksbill Turtle
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority - Marine Turtles
- Australian Government Department of Environment and Energy - Marine Turtles in Australia
- Sea Turtle Foundation
- Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance
- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection - Marine Turtles
- Reef Guardian Schools - Marine Turtles

Some places to get information about water pollution:

- WWF - Marine Problems - Pollution
- National Ocean Service - What Is The Biggest Source Of Pollution In The Ocean?
- National Geographic - Marine Pollution



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