



STOP! MICRO WASTE

## OUR INVISIBLE ENEMY

MICROPLASTICS ARE EVERYWHERE: IN THE AIR, WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND IN YOUR STOMACHS. THEY ARE POISONING US BUT JUST A FEW WORRY ABOUT IT. STOP! MICRO WASTE FIGHTS ALSO AGAINST DISINFORMATION: «IT IS HARD TO MAKE THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE. AND SOMETIMES, THE INDUSTRY DOESN'T EVEN WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT IT»

They are invisible to the eye, but they are everywhere. And they are very dangerous, even deadly. The microplastics (particles with a diameter from 330 micrometres to 5 millimetres) that can be found in the air, water and environment are a potential plague of which just a few worry about. Public opinion is practically in the dark about it. Nevertheless, the fight against plastic waste should involve public opinion. It's for this reason that STOP! Micro Waste comes forward. This non-profit organisation based in Germany and founded by Langbrett, a group of surfers and nature lovers, wants to battle microplastics and their effects.

**This is a battle of the greatest environmental, but also health-related value:** just think that, for example, 20% of the Mediterranean marine species that end up on our plates contain microplastics, that we ingest. According to a study commissioned by the WWF and carried out by a team of researchers of the University of Newcastle in Australia, each of us drinks or eats an average of five grams of plastic per week: The weight of a credit card. STOP! Micro Waste tackles this issue on various fronts: theoretical, educational and practical, as explains Julia Krippendorf.

*Microplastics are one of the biggest environmental problems. Could you explain us why?*

**JK:** Microplastics are everywhere. They're in the air we breathe. They can be found in the Arctic ice and remotest parts of the deep sea. They're proven to be in our foods: honey, water, salt and beer. And they are in our bodies. Once they are in the environment, **they are irreversible and not biodegradable.** There will never be any technology that can change that. In the environment, they accumulate toxins and harmful bacteria, the so-called biofilm. Being mistaken for plankton, they enter the marine food chain and thus also end up on our plates.

*People hardly know the dangers of microplastics.*

**JK:** It is hard to make the invisible visible. And sometimes, the industry doesn't even want people to know about it. We are glad that people become more and more aware of the problem. We need to spread knowledge about the topic and raise awareness whenever we can.

*Dust and dirt in our homes consist of up to 90% microplastics. The 20% of the sea species that end up on our plates contain plastic. What are the effects on our organism and on the environment?*

**JK:** Microplastics transfer **harmful substances** such as heavy metals into our bodies. We ingest particles with additives, such as plasticisers, through foods and inhale [...]

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microfibers through the air we breathe. Although there aren't any long-term studies proving that microplastics harm our health, the effects of plastics on our organism have been shown in numerous studies.

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*With the Guppyfriend Washing Bag we wanted to display the problem of microplastic pollution deriving from the use of synthetic textiles*

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*How can we fight the effects of microplastics?*

**JK:** We can't. We need to **prevent** plastic from entering our environment in the first place. We need to drastically reduce our plastic consumption, reflect on our buying and washing habits, avoid unnecessary packaging and be critical towards misleading advertisements.

*Stop! Micro Waste is an important project. Could you describe it? When and how was it created?*

**JK:** We have our clothing brand **Langbrett**, for which we produce textiles and shoes in Portugal and Germany, made of natural materials. We work in a closed loop recycling system, source every detail of our shoes and don't use any additives or materials that could harm nature. With the Guppyfriend Washing Bag we wanted



to inform customers and somehow display the problem of microplastic pollution deriving from the use of synthetic textiles. We founded our NGO **STOP! Micro Waste** around it to raise awareness about this topic and to combine education, activities in nature and solutions to this problem. We developed **pragmatic filter solutions, like the Guppyfriend Washing Bag**, to educate costumers on microplastic pollution. By using these hands-on solutions, we make people reflect on their own buying and washing habits so that they can start changing their behaviour.

*STOP! Plastic Academy and STOP! Stations are your way of approaching youngest generations. Could you describe these projects?*

**JK:** With the **STOP! Plastic Academy** we spread our own (micro)plastic knowledge based on our research findings, experiences and scientific



papers. Our **Train-the-Trainer** programme enables school children and company representatives to spread their newly acquired knowledge to their colleagues, customers and peers. During a Train-the-Trainer programme, we educate STOP! Plastic Academy Coaches on the topic of (micro)plastics. We strive to provide the coaches with **methods and knowledge to raise awareness about (micro)plastic pollution** and to guide children and adolescents in building local **STOP! Stations** - solutions to stop plastic entering nature.

***Raising awareness about microplastic pollution is fundamental, but you have more pragmatic solutions, like the Guppyfriend Washing Bags.***

**JK:** Microplastics surround us. They are everywhere. We are working on several solutions and communication tools to show these problems, e.g. a filter for a cleaning bucket or a detergent that prevents microfibers from breaking in the first place.

***Could you give us any practical recommendation to limit micro waste (apart from using the Guppyfriend Washing Bag)?***

**JK:** We need to reflect on

our washing habits. Our **Ten For The Ocean Wash Guide** provides 10 simple rules on how to wash better to reduce microfiber pollution and to protect synthetic textiles ([www.stopmicrowaste.com/tenfortheocean](http://www.stopmicrowaste.com/tenfortheocean)). Of course, we also need to reflect on our consumption and use of plastics in general. First of all, we need to **buy less, but better products**.

***What are the next steps for Stop! Micro Waste?***

**JK:** We will keep spreading the word about (micro)plastic pollution, work on pragmatic solutions and expand our Train-the-Trainer programme. A lot of people haven't heard anything about microplastic pollution yet. However, we are

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