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Suggested title: UK one of the highest-risk countries for plastic pellet pollution, citizen science reveals

Suggested subheading: As the Great Nurdle Hunt passes 30,000 volunteers, new analysis shows communities and the environment across 103 UK local authorities are impacted by nurdle pollution and are at risk of further pollution.

Nurdles are the tiny plastic pellets, each about the size of a lentil, that are melted down to make almost all our plastic products. Nurdles are a major source of microplastic pollution globally due to a lack of regulation on the plastic industry. Environmental charity Fidra's annual Great Global Nurdle Hunt uses citizen science to document the problem this year taking place 4th September -4th October 2026. Since 2013 more than 30,000 volunteers, across every continent, have taken part in nurdle hunts by searching coastlines for these plastic pellets and logging their finds.

An estimated 1,000 tonnes of nurdles are lost to the UK environment each year. With its plastics industry, major ports and busy shipping routes, the UK is one of the highest-risk countries in the world. New analysis has revealed that communities and the environment in 103 Local Authorities are affected by nurdle pollution and are at further risk. In July 2026, an estimated over 17 tonnes of nurdles spilled into the Port of Tyne, this was less than 18 months after a previous spill in the North Sea.

Fidra is calling on the UK Government to introduce legally binding rules to stop pellet loss, including regulation on land and mandatory measures at sea. Research suggests 95% of nurdle pollution could be prevented by introducing stronger compulsory standards throughout the plastics supply chain. The EU has already introduced stricter rules on how pellets are handled and transported, aiming to minimise nurdle loss throughout the supply chain.

Nurdles harm wildlife and coastal communities. Animals can mistake them for food, leading to organ damage or starvation, while the pellets bring microplastics and harmful chemicals into the food chain.

Heather McFarlane, Senior Project Manager at Fidra said: "*The UK is home to some of the worst plastic pellet pollution in the world, it is sad to see its impacts. Nurdles are highly persistent in the environment and very challenging to clean up. We are hugely grateful to the volunteers who have helped to document the scale of this nurdle pollution and tried to protect their beaches. Nurdle pollution easily preventable, but without robust regulation the UK will keep facing spills and ongoing pollution from the plastics industry. We urgently need new UK regulation and stronger International Maritime Organization rules for pellet loss prevention, alongside preparedness plans for spills and existing pollution to be dealt with swiftly.*"

Lou Shackleton, a volunteer from Whitley Bay that has been involved in the Port of Tyne nurdle spill response said: *"It is devastating to see how much of the UK is impacted by nurdle pollution. More than three months after the Port of Tyne spill, residents in the North East are still clearing plastic pellets by hand. Only 5 of almost 18 tonnes that entered the river have been recovered, and paid staff are being dialled down while deposits are still washing up. No community should have to clean up this*

pollution with their own sieves and gloves. The Port tells us voluntary guidelines are impossible to follow because pellet containers aren't labelled at source. Without mandatory international regulation, this could happen again."

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Notes to editors

1. **The Great Global Nurdle Hunt** is Fidra's annual citizen science event. It is part of the Great Nurdle Hunt project and since 2013 more than 30,000 volunteers have taken part in total. The 2026 hunt involved nearly 300 surveys across 19 countries. Globally 40% nurdle hunts found more than 100 nurdles, in the UK, 60% the nurdle hunts found more than 100 nurdles.
2. **The UK analysis:** the 103 UK local authorities statistic comes from mapping all-time nurdle finds against local authority boundaries.
3. **Nurdle loss and prevention:** An estimated 1,000 tonnes of nurdles are lost to the UK environment each year from production, transport, handling and recycling https://eunomia.eco/reports/study-to-quantify-pellet-emissions-in-the-uk/ . The 95% prevention figure comes from the Eunomia, "Investigating Options for Reducing Release in the Aquatic Environment of Microplastics Emitted by Products".
4. **Recent spills:** In July 2026, 17 tonnes of nurdles were spilled into the Port of Tyne. In March 2025, a major nurdle spill occurred in the North Sea near Humberside.
5. **EU regulation:** In late 2025, the EU approved new legislation to prevent plastic pellet loss.
6. **Images and video:** Images from this year's nurdle hunt in the UK are available on request. Images and videos of the North East nurdle spill are available in this google drive. Please see the media usage policy and use the appropriate credits. Please get in touch if you would like any more images.
7. **Interviews:** nurdle team members are available for interview, contact 07483441534.
8. **About Fidra:** Fidra set up and runs The Great Nurdle Hunt to support the aim of preventing plastic pellet pollution. Fidra is an environmental charity working to reduce plastic waste and chemical pollution in our seas, on our beaches and in the wider environment. Fidra shines a light on environmental issues, working with the public, industry and governments to deliver solutions which support sustainable societies and healthy ecosystems. We use the best available science to identify and understand environmental issues, developing pragmatic solutions through inclusive dialogue. We aim to stop further plastic pellet pollution of our seas and beaches using a combination of public and industry engagement. The online nurdle map www.nurdlehunt.org.uk pinpoints hundreds of locations where pellets have been found across the world. Fidra is a Scottish registered charity and SCIO (SC043895).

Credit: Sarah Hodgson, Dorset Wildlife Trust

Credit: Mike McDonnell, “The Bay: A Blueprint for Recovery (Wyre) Lancashire Wildlife Trust”