

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 GMT – 9th November 2021

Global plastic pollution survey reveals 91% of countries taking part impacted by industrial plastic pellet pollution on coastlines.

Hundreds of thousands of plastic pellets (nurdles) have been found on coastlines around the world during the environmental charity Fidra's Great Global Nurdle Hunt 2021. Results from the [Great Global Nurdle Hunt](#), a worldwide citizen science survey, released today show that nurdles were found in 91% of countries that took part (21 out of 23).

More than 900 volunteers spent a total of 730 hours scouring beaches for these tiny microplastic pellets. Racking up a total of 274 hunts over the month of October with millions estimated to be found in some of the worst hotspots surveyed.

Nurdles are small round pellets produced by the plastics industry and are melted down to make nearly all our plastic products, from car parts to medical supplies. These small pellets are adding up to a big pollution problem. Nurdles are often mishandled by industry and leak out across all parts of the global plastics supply chain.

Once produced in plastic manufacturing plants, nurdles travel far and wide across the globe being shipped and couriered to multiple destinations before they are made into a plastic product. At each stage of transport and handling, nurdles can be spilled into the environment. The results released today from the month-long global survey in October demonstrate that nurdles are polluting coastlines worldwide and people all over the world want to see further action to address the issue.

925 of volunteers took part in the survey, including Melissa Nel a Volunteer Coordinator and Research Assistant for The Orca Foundation in South Africa. Melissa found over 10,000 nurdles in two days whilst participating in the event.

"Beach clean ups are a big part of our program. After seeing the Fidra nurdle movement, we decided to focus most of our clean ups on nurdle collecting."

"About 1 year ago nurdles started washing up in huge numbers along Plettenberg Bays beaches and there has been a huge community drive to help assist in the nurdle problem - which has been amazing. But there is still a lot of work to do. It is the worst of times, but it is the best of times because we still have a chance to make a difference. The Orca Foundation is grateful to be able to educate and make a positive impact on our environment, as well as our community, every day."

Nurdles are a persistent pollutant once in the environment. Some of the nurdles counted in South Africa this year are likely to be from the 2017 Durban pellet spill. Billions of pellets spilled into the sea after a container fell from a ship in the port. The global survey also highlights

nurdle pollution from another [nurdle spill off the coast of Sri Lanka this year](#), which is thought to be the biggest nurdle spill to date. These repeated spills across the world demonstrate this is an ongoing global problem and that current voluntary industry initiatives to contain nurdles are not sufficient to solve it.

Nurdles and the climate crisis

Fidra are presenting the results of the [Great Global Nurdle Hunt at COP26](#) in Glasgow on November 9th 2021.

Megan Kirton, Fidra, says:

“COP 26 is a real opportunity to highlight pellet pollution to international decision makers and we can't thank all our volunteers enough for helping us show that this is a widespread global pollution issue that needs action now.” She continues:

“We can't keep using energy and fossil fuels to make plastic that ends up in the environment. Nurdle pollution demonstrates plastic is being wasted before it has even been used to make anything, which is a huge waste of resources and a threat to wildlife.”

Nurdles in the environment represent a huge waste of resources. Most plastic is made from fossil fuels, and the production of nurdles contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. If growth of the plastics industry continues, it will account for 20% of global oil consumption by 2050 ([CIEL 2021, Plastic & Climate: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet](#)).

Once in the environment nurdles are almost impossible to remove, reuse, or recycle, and studies have shown that plastic on beaches can release CO₂, ethylene, methane and propane gases that all contribute to the greenhouse effect ([Royer et al, 2018](#)).

Nurdles are an example of how plastic pollution is adding to pressures already faced by ecosystems and coastal communities today. Reducing plastic and chemical pollution is vital if we are to address the dual biodiversity and climate crises.

What is the solution to nurdle pollution?

Fidra along with other NGOs around the world are pushing for [global solutions to this plastic pollution issue](#). Fidra are working with industry, trade associations, NGOs and decision makers to work towards a [pellet supply chain free of nurdle pollution](#).

Megan Kirton, Fidra, said *“Take part in this ongoing citizen science survey, and add your voice and data to the pellet pollution map, by heading to www.nurdlehunt.org.uk.”*

Contact Details

Megan Kirton, Project Officer, Fidra

Email: Megan.kirton@fidra.org.uk

Contact Number: 07483441534

Images

A selection of images can be found below. Please use the caption and credit as stated in the image title.



Caption: Nurdle hunters taken part in The Great Global Nurdle Hunt with Parley for the Oceans, Sri Lanka.

Image credit: Parley for the Oceans, Sri Lanka/ The Great Nurdle Hunt



Caption: A collection of nurdles found by Wild Oceans, South Africa, during The Great Global Nurdle Hunt.

Image credit: Wild Oceans, South Africa/The Great Nurdle Hunt



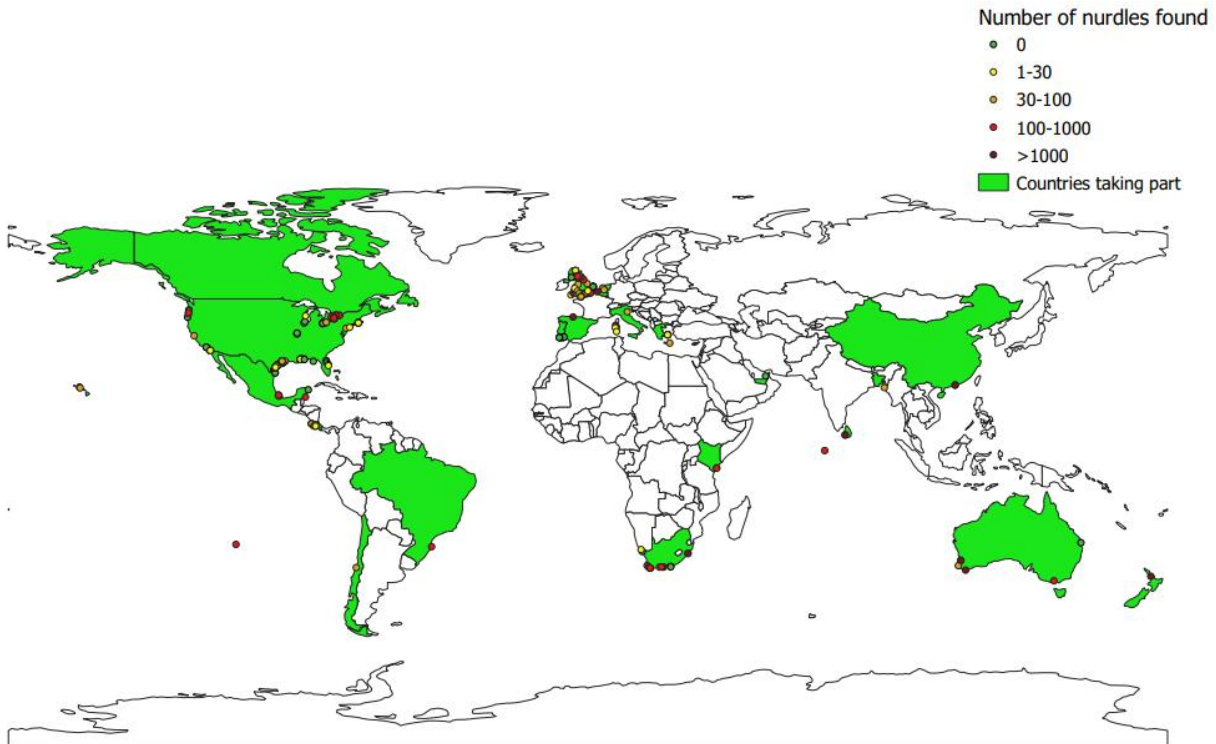
Caption: Pre-production plastic pellets or 'nurdles' collected by a nurdle hunter in Spain as part of The Great Global Nurdle Hunt.

Image credit: K Berger, Spain/ The Great Nurdle Hunt



Caption: A community group in Fife, Scotland take part in the Great Global Nurdle Hunt

Image credit: Joanne M, Scotland/ The Great Nurdle Hunt



Caption: A map of nurdle hunts and countries that participated in The Great Global Nurdle Hunt 2021
Image credit: Fidra/ The Great Nurdle Hunt

Notes to editors

Results of the Great Global Nurdle Hunt:

- A total of 274 nurdle hunts took place over the whole month of October (1st – 31st October 2021).
- Nurdles were found in 91% of all countries surveyed.
- Nurdle hunts took place in the following 23 countries: United Arab Emirates, Australia, Belgium, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Spain, United Kingdom, Guernsey, Greece, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, United States, South Africa, Italy.
- 925 people took part in the global event this year including 48 organisations, businesses, and community groups from across the world.
- A total of 730 volunteer hours were spent hunting.

What are nurdles?

Nurdles are small plastic pellets that are produced and melted down to make almost all our plastic products. It is estimated that 230,000 tonnes could be lost to the oceans globally, every year. Once in the environment they are hard to remove, and last for a long time. Nurdles contain a mixture of chemicals, can adsorb toxins present in the water. Easily mistaken for food by many animals, nurdles and their toxins can enter the food chain.

Worldwide context

The global survey has coincided with other pollution events this year highlighting the international and chronic nature of this problem. The recent [nurdle spill off the coast of Sri Lanka](#), caused by the X-Press Pearl cargo ship catching fire and spilling millions of nurdles into the sea, has caused devastating impacts on the ecosystems in Sri Lanka. This has been predicted to be the biggest nurdle spill of all time and highlights current voluntary industry solutions are not sufficient.

About us



The Great Global Nurdle Hunt is run by environmental charity Fidra with the support of volunteers and NGOs worldwide. Fidra shines a light on environmental issues, working with the public, industry and governments to deliver pragmatic, evidence-based solutions to pollution and habitat degradation. Our projects support sustainable societies and healthy ecosystems. Fidra is a Scottish registered charity and SCIO (no.SC043895). www.fidra.org.uk



The Great Global Nurdle Hunt is an annual event part of The Great Nurdle Hunt; a citizen engagement project that aims to raise awareness of plastic pellet (nurdle) pollution and build data on the extent of this problem globally. Taking part is easy, fun and contributes valuable data, illustrating worldwide nurdle pollution. www.nurdlehunt.org.uk