1.56 Billion Masks Ended Up in Our Oceans Last Year

The latest studies on masks estimate that humans are using 129 billion face masks each month, or around 3 million a minute. Experts have warned that mask pollution may be our next big plastic problem. The world health organization estimates 89 million medical masks are required each month for Covid response, with little chance of a decrease anytime soon.

A year ago U.S officials estimated the country would need 300 million face masks to meet the need for the pandemic. The company 3M made 550 million masks in 2019 and has plans to produce 2 billion masks this year, for as long as the pandemic lasts.

There's no way to recycle plastic masks the same way there are plastic water bottles and other plastic products. Most disposable face masks are made of three layers that just continue to break down into smaller and smaller nanoparticles.

> *Like other plastic debris, "disposable masks may accumulate and release harmful chemical and biological substances, such as* ***bisphenol A****,* ***heavy metals*** *and pathogenic microorganisms,"* ***according*** *to Xu and Ren. Some of the* ***toxic chemicals*** *released during degradation of plastic polymers include* ***phthalates****,* ***organotin****,* ***nonylphenol****,* ***polybrominated biphenyl ether*** *and* ***triclosan****.*
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> *3 Million Masks a Minute: The Next Plastic Problem?*

OceanAsia reports 52 billion face masks were produced in 2020. Of those, 1.56 billion masks were estimated to have ended up in the ocean. Using a reusable cotton mask is better for both your health and the environment.