

Trillions of Plastic Bits, Swept Up by Current, Are Littering Arctic Waters

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The world's oceans are littered with trillions of pieces of plastic — bottles, bags, toys, fishing nets and more, mostly in tiny particles — and now this seaborne junk is making its way into the Arctic.

In a study published Wednesday in *Science Advances*, a group of researchers from the University of Cádiz in Spain and several other institutions show that a major ocean current is carrying bits of plastic, mainly from the North Atlantic, to the Greenland and Barents seas, and leaving them there — in surface waters, in sea ice and possibly on the ocean floor.

Because climate change is already shrinking the Arctic sea ice cover, more human activity in this still-isolated part of the world is increasingly likely as navigation becomes easier. As a result, plastic pollution, which has grown significantly around the world since 1980, could spread more widely in the Arctic in decades to come, the researchers say.

Andrés Cózar Cabañas, the study's lead author and a professor of biology at the University of Cádiz, said he was surprised by the results, and worried about possible outcomes.