



Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution Legal Frameworks



InforMEA
UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION PORTAL ON
MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

UN
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United Nations
Environment Programme



Course Syllabus

Course overview

The scale and rapidly increasing volume of marine litter and plastic pollution are putting the health of all the world's oceans and seas at risk. Marine plastic litter has been found at all ocean depths and on the shores of even the most remote Pacific islands. Furthermore, emissions of plastic waste into aquatic ecosystems are projected to nearly triple by 2040 without meaningful action.

This course begins with an introduction to marine litter and plastic pollution, including the key facts and figures, the main sources and impacts (including on human rights) and some of the applicable environmental law principles. It then outlines the relevant legal and policy frameworks at the global and regional levels, before analyzing the main regulatory approaches taken at the country level.

The course explores how despite all of this myriad action, the high and rapidly increasing levels of plastic pollution continue to represent a serious problem on a global scale, prompting the international community in 2022 to agree to develop a new international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.

Learning objectives

At the end of this course you will be able to:

- Understand the sources and impacts of marine litter and plastic pollution;
- Appreciate the main principles of environmental law of relevance to addressing marine litter and plastic pollution;
- Assess the extent to which the international legal framework on the protection of the marine environment has addressed marine litter and plastic pollution;
- Appreciate the relevance of international water law, international biodiversity law, international chemicals law, international trade law and international human rights law in the context of marine litter and plastic pollution;
- Understand the recent process towards the development of an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution and marine litter;
- Assess the extent to which regional approaches have been developed to address marine litter; and
- Understand the range of possible regulatory responses at the national level, and give examples of laws from a range of countries.

Content and duration

This online course is comprised of 4 lessons, which provides links to relevant reference materials for further reading. The lessons are organized in interactive modules that combine the course theory with exercises and interactions that will facilitate the learning process.

This core content of the lessons is complemented with additional materials, such as videos, publications and external websites.

It will take you approximately 1 hour 30 minutes to complete the course, excluding additional materials. This is a self-paced course that allows you to manage your time as you wish. You can navigate the lessons at your convenience and retake them whenever you wish.

Completion and certificate

Take the quiz at the end of the course to assess your learning progress.

You are required to answer at least 80% of the assessment questions correctly in order to obtain a course certificate.

Before obtaining the certificate you also need to submit the course survey (your feedback). This survey helps us to improve the course, develop new courses and assess if you are achieving your learning objectives.

Lesson 1: Introduction

- Overview of marine litter and plastic pollution;
- Sources and impacts of marine plastic pollution;
- Relevant environmental law principles and approaches;
- Human rights impacts

Lesson 2: Global Legal and Policy Frameworks

- UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), London Convention and Protocol, MARPOL, International Water Law, Basel and Stockholm Conventions, World Trade Organisation, Convention on Biological Diversity;
- UN Environmental Assembly and the Process Towards a Global Legally Binding Treaty on Plastic Pollution;
- Soft law instruments and policy approaches including:
 - The Honolulu Strategy;
 - Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and Global Partnership on Marine Litter;
 - GloLitter Partnerships Project to tackle marine plastic litter from shipping and fisheries;
 - 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP)

Lesson 3: Regional Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans including:
 - Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean;
 - The Regional Action Plan for Marine Litter for the Wider Caribbean Region;
 - Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia.
- Other Regional Frameworks and Initiatives including:
 - East Asia, ASEAN and APEC;
 - South Pacific;
 - Africa;
 - European Union

Lesson 4: National Regulatory Approaches

- Bans and Restrictions;
- Economic Instruments;
- Standards, Certification and Labelling;
- Post Consumer Use/Product End of Life (including Extended Producer Responsibility);
- Combined approaches and Other Important Measures