

SURFRIDER FOUNDATION DENOUNCES A WHITE TIDE OFF THE COAST OF GALICIA

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Surfrider Foundation Europe denounces a veritable white tide of microplastics in Galicia, which threatens the entire Atlantic coast.

Presence of pellets on the Galician coasts

Noia Limpa, a Galician NGO dedicated to coastal protection, has raised the alarm and reports that since mid-December, dozens of sacks full of plastic pellets have been found on the beaches. Specifically, more than 50 sacks of 25 kilograms each were found scattered around the Rías Baixas, especially in the estuary of Muros

and Noia. These bags bear the name of the company Bedeko Europe, a company based in Poland, specialised in masterbatch and additives for plastics. Noia Limpa contacted Surfrider Foundation, a European ocean protection association that has been fighting against plastic pellet pollution for more than 10 years. After visiting the site, members of the association were able to observe a real white tide.

Plastic pellets, also known as "pellets", are small spheres (typically less than 5 mm) that are used as raw materials in the manufacture of plastic products. These microplastics reach the environment through constant losses by the companies that work with them, in the different stages of the plastic production and distribution chain (production, transport, recycling...). To date, more than 52 bags full of pellets have been found on the coasts and it is not known exactly how many were dumped into the sea. Each one may contain up to 1 million of these small pieces of plastic. It is a huge white tide and an ecological disaster. Once in the ocean, the pellets float on the surface, allowing them to circulate freely over large areas, affecting flora and fauna. Because of their small size and light weight, they are almost impossible to clean up once they wash up on beaches. Plastic pellets contain many additives that are harmful to human health and the environment. In this case, the contents of these bags were identified as UV light stabilisers.

[Photos from previous days](#)

[Photos from 4 January](#)

A container loss at sea

The presence of plastic pellets in the environment has been reported for decades. It has only been in the last five years, thanks to the tireless work of various organisations, that the seriousness of the microplastic pollution problem has been revealed on an international, state and local scale. Pellets are a mixture of chemicals, "toxic sponges" that attract chemical toxins and other pollutants to their surfaces. It is estimated that between 50,000 and 185,000 tonnes of pellets were lost to the environment in 2019. This would equate to the loss of between 21,000 and 73,000 truckloads of pellets each year (EU data).

Surfrider Foundation has been working for years to expose such incidents and failures along the value chain. Surfrider works at international and European level for measures to regulate the production, distribution and transport of pellets. At the national level, it has launched an environmental liability action together with

Good Karma Projects and INSTA (<https://www.surfrider.es/informarse/noticias/primera-victoria-1211219231478.html>).

Six containers were reported lost in the vicinity of Viana do Castelo, Portugal. One of these 6 containers was carrying pellets, but it is not known how many sacks the container was carrying. Thanks to the registration and photographs taken by Noia Limpa and Galician volunteers, it is estimated that around 52 bags have been collected, but there are still new reports of pellets being scattered and bags appearing on various beaches in Galicia.

European legislation under review

The situation here reveals that two environmental problems are poorly regulated, both at international and European level. The problem is that the loss of containers at sea is poorly regulated by the international maritime organisation. Moreover, there are no preventive measures or penalties for the loss of containers.

Furthermore, we are faced with a lack of accountability in the value chain of plastic pellets at European level. On 16 October 2023, the European Commission published a regulatory proposal for this sector. Surfrider is now working to improve this proposal, which for the moment is still weakened by numerous exemptions, on maritime transport, which is not covered.

According to Xavier Curto, coordinator of Surfrider Spain "From our NGO, we ask the relevant authorities and administration to take measures to regulate and sanction the loss of containers. This is necessary if we want to prevent this type of pollution and the recurrence of more white tides".

Surfrider calls on community to be vigilant

In order to have eyes on the ground, the collaboration of the whole community is important. For Maria Ballesteros, head of volunteering at Surfrider Spain, "Every time you find a bag with pellets, it is very important that you report the exact place where it is. Then it is necessary to take photos of the bags from all angles, especially if they mention a source and a batch number.

In case of broken bags, you need to have photos taken close up, to see characteristics such as the look and feel of the bags as well as the look and colour of the pellets.

If the bags have not been torn, citizens are invited to take them to the shore of the beach to prevent them from being carried by the tide back into the sea. The bags are fragile, so they should be handled with great care. Subsequently, the council's technical services should be informed in order to remove them and prevent them from re-entering the sea.

More information :

- [See the Surfrider Foundation's report with different cases in Europe.](#)
- [Educational video](#) about pellets here

We remain at the disposal of journalists for any request for information or interviews.

CONTACT :

Lionel Cheylus | Media relations manager | +33 6 08 10 58 02 | lcheyus@surfrider.eu

Maydelee Hernandez | Media relations assistant | presse@surfrider.eu

Maria Ballesteros | Surfrider España | +34 656 18 27 97 | mballesteros@surfrider.eu

Madison Hourihan | Noia Limpa | +34 685 72 87 77 | info@noialimpa.org

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