

I had to get something for Dad out of the garden shed. That is when I found this peculiar machine; similar in shape and size to a jukebox, with brass pipes around it, making it look like a tuba had been attached to it. Suddenly I'm being sucked in through this spout; screaming, everything went black. I open my eyes to find myself on a beach; the machine sitting behind me. I look closer at the machine; a small box on the front read;

Year: 2095

It was then that I figure out what the machine was; it was a time machine, in which I had been teleported into the future.

I explore the beach; it was nothing like the pristine beaches I'm used to seeing. A blanket of litter and waste spanned the entire beach, as far as the eye could see; the layer of black smog that filled the sky was so thick that you could barely see the sun. Wheezing and coughing, I wander a little further up the beach. I felt water against my ankle; looking out towards what I thought would have been ocean, the only view that met my eye was a sea of plastic bags and bottles, fishing nets of many different kinds, cigarette butts and aluminium cans. Continuing on for a few metres, I saw a lone sea bird; it had managed to get itself aloft, hovering a few metres above the ground; but it seemed to have great difficulty maintaining flight. It wasn't long before the bird fell from the sky. I rushed over to where the bird landed. The bird died where it lay, giving me a glance of hopelessness as it did so; an image I would never forget. It was easy to see what had killed off the poor creature; entangled in netting and other debris, it was severely malnourished. There I stood, in silence; feeling so inadequate in this desolate, wasted landscape. The machine sucked me in again, transporting me back to the present day.

This all may seem unrealistic, time machines haven't been invented yet, and they certainly aren't going to teach us about the consequences of pollution; but many of the forms of pollution seen in this story are already beginning to occur.

A recent study involving scientists from around the world suggests that there are more than 5 trillion pieces of plastic alone in our oceans; not to mention the other kinds of debris out there as well. This debris has harmful effects on the entire marine ecosystem; it can be consumed, animals can become entangled in it, and the chemicals released as the debris breaks down are harmful to all biotic organisms within the ecosystem.

Litter and water pollution aren't the only forms of pollution around that can be seen today. While there are many other forms, air pollution and smog is becoming an increasing threat to our society. Pollutants in the air, created by vehicles, factories and many other sources; reacts with sunlight and heat to create photochemical smog. This form of smog is already causing problems in China; its capital, Beijing, being said to be "almost uninhabitable for human beings"¹.

These are just the facts. We are learning more about how pollution, in its many forms, could wipe out all existing life on our planet. Facts alone can't solve this problem though. What is required is a change in attitude. If we change how we think, we might just be able to eliminate this problem.

References

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/25/china-toxic-air-pollution-nuclear-winter-scientists>¹

<http://oceancrusaders.org/crusades/plastic-crusades/plastic-statistics/>

<http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/feb/12/coastal-communities-dumping-8m-tonnes-of-plastic-in-oceans-every-year>

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/dec/10/full-scale-plastic-worlds-oceans-revealed-first-time-pollution>

<http://theconversation.com/eight-million-tonnes-of-plastic-are-going-into-the-ocean-each-year-37521>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/25/china-toxic-air-pollution-nuclear-winter-scientists>

<http://weather.about.com/od/ozoneinformation/qt/smogcity.htm>

<http://www.nrdc.org/health/climate/airpollution.asp>