



The Nurdle Patrol

Nurdles are taking over our beaches. No, they're not non-surfing geeks or valley-living commuters. Nurdles are the tiny beads of plastic from which all plastic is made, including Styrofoam. Thing is, nurdles never die; every nurdle created over past decades is still out there, and "there" is usually our beaches and oceans. It's a fact that became painfully apparent to one Newport Harbor High class run by longtime teacher and surfer Scott Morlan.

His class is billed as a surf class but Morlan admits that that's a bit of a misnomer. "The kids really don't know what they're getting into," he says with a smile. "Surfing is just the reward." In fact, the surfing part comes only after six weeks of in-class environmental lectures and visits by representatives from Surfrider Foundation, Project Wipeout and other water safety and environmental groups. And it's worked. His class is and will be the official center for Youth Against Styrofoam. In addition to beach cleanup days – mixed in among surfing days – the kids hold press conferences and lobby local governments for change. "The kids are focusing on Styrofoam because that's what they found the most of on their beach cleanup days," says Morlan. "They each took three square foot areas and found it impossible to totally clean. They left the beach disgust-

ed, but motivated."

The kids are up against a lot, though. Consider that of the 75 billion tons of plastic produced each year, only three percent is reused in recyclable material. Or that a merchant can purchase a Styrofoam cup for two cents, as opposed to a paper cup for five to 10 cents. That's

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hard to combat. It's also short-sighted, says Stephanie Barger, executive director of Earth Resources Group, of which YAS is a chapter. "For the true cost [of styrofoam] you have to factor in the \$99 million, not counting volunteer hours, the state pays to clean up the beaches," she says. Then there are the health risks, she adds. Because the small Styrofoam nurdles resemble krill, fish eat them. "Plastic bio-accumulates in fish, we eat the fish, and it accumulates in us," she says.

Studies by Dr. Michael Baker, a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Diego, back up these claims. So does the fact that the cities of Portland and Berkeley have outlawed the use of Styrofoam products. "We're behind the curve," says Barger.

But that doesn't stop Morlan and his class from trying. They realize you have to start small with even the biggest challenge. "It's hard when we see the major pollution problems spots like Doheny, Dana Point, Huntington and Malibu are having," he says. "I try to share with them what this area used to be like, and could be again. I don't want them to bring their kids here in 20 years and have to say, 'We used to be able to go in that water.'"

To start an Earth Resource Foundation club at your school call (949) 645-5163 or www.earthresource.org.

—Terence Loose