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STUDY REVEALS WIDESPREAD PLASTIC DISTRIBUTION IN ANTARCTIC WATERS

Report released as research vessel arrives in Hawaii during 3-year study

LONG BEACH, California, September 19, 2011 – Scientists from the Algalita Marine Research Foundation (Long Beach, California), in cooperation with the TARA Foundation, report findings of plastic pollution in Antarctic waters. During a 2011 segment of a three year circumnavigation voyage by the vessel TARA, every sample taken from the Antarctic Ocean contained plastic with the count between 956 and 42,826 pieces per kilometer squared at each of the stations. These samples were collected at or near the ocean's surface and show that plastic pollution has found its way to the most remote parts of the globe. The full effects wrought by this pollution continue to be investigated and include the study of marine birds, mammals, and fish that ingest small bits of plastic and/or get entangled in large pieces, as well as the relationship between plastics and the marine microbes that colonize them. Additional analysis is being conducted to understand human health risks associated with these plastics, plastic additives (e.g., BPA), and toxins that sorb to the plastics (e.g., DDT), as they enter the food web.

As exploration continues in the Antarctic, South Pacific, and other oceans, reports of the distribution and accumulation of plastic will be prepared by the Algalita Marine Research Foundation research team and made available for review.

To measure the quantity of plastic in waters explored during the Tara Oceans expedition, the Algalita Marine Research Foundation proposed a unique scientific protocol first used aboard Tara in Antarctica during January 2011. Since then, at every sampling station throughout the expedition, a special surface net is lowered into the water for an hour and a half to collect particles of plastic. These samples are then analyzed by Algalita Marine Research Foundation.

Tara Oceans is a unique 3-year marine research expedition (September 2009 to March 2012) based on a 118-foot schooner. Participants include several American university marine research programs, the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Health, and other U.S.-based organizations.

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Tara operates under the auspices of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The vessel is a floating research platform directed by Dr. Eric Karsenti and Etienne Bourgois. Its principal objectives are to enable scientists to study little known aspects of ocean ecosystems including planktonic life and the effect of global warming on this fundamental element of the marine food chain. Also studied are the effects of global warming on coral reefs and the marine life dependent upon them.

Tara will stop-over in Honolulu (September 19th, 2011), San Diego (October 27th, 2011) and New York (February 2012). Throughout the rest of the expedition, the boat will continue measuring plastic in the ocean, notably in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, where plastic sampling will be combined with biological investigations. Both genomic and biogeochemical techniques will be used to characterize the microbial communities that colonize and live on the plastic debris, to draw some of the first impressions of this microbe-plastic relationship.

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NOTE: Copies of the research are available upon request.

READ MORE - For additional information about Algalita Marine Research Foundation, Captain Charles Moore, and to learn more about our mission, outreach programs, and research projects, please visit www.algalita.org or call 562.598.4889.

To learn more about Tara Foundation, please visit www.taraexpeditions.org