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Mask Waste Hazards & Hooked on Scuba

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A Plastic Pandemic. A glut of discarded single-use masks and gloves is washing up on shorelines and littering the seabed. Conservationists have warned that the coronavirus pandemic could spark a surge in ocean pollution -- adding to a glut of plastic waste that already threatens marine life -- after finding disposable masks floating like jellyfish and waterlogged latex gloves scattered across sea beds. Divers have found "Covid waste" -- dozens of gloves, masks, and bottles of hand sanitizer -- beneath the waves of the Mediterranean, mixed with the usual litter of disposable cups and aluminum cans. Wear a mask, but be careful with its disposal. 129 billion facemasks are disposed of every month. (*The Guardian/BBC*) [Watch the video](#)

Hooked on Scuba? Diver J.T. Thompson had gone out from Orange Beach, Alabama, spearfishing, and was about 100-ft. deep when his neck jerked, and he immediately realized he'd been hooked. The guy on the surface with the rod then began to play the big 'fish' he thought had caught, and Thompson found himself being dragged to the surface. He managed to break free before he reached the surface, when the angler's boat took off. Thompson says he saw the funny side. We don't. He could've been hurt by a too-fast ascent. (*WKRG*)

Corrections to An Earlier Email: Currently, only Solomon Islands citizens and residents are permitted to enter the country, and they are required to undertake 14 days' quarantine in a government facility on arrival. Solomon Airlines has suspended all international flights until at least August 31 (except for a few repatriation flights for citizens). Meanwhile, in the Turks & Caicos, Providenciales airport is due to open July 22, with the Grand Turk airstrip to follow at the end of August, but all adult visitors must now provide proof of a Coronavirus negative test made five days before arrival.

Arising from the Ashes of Closure. Good news for past customers of Don Foster's dive center in Grand Cayman: Its ex-business manager, Sergio Coni, plans to bring it back from closure in a slimmed-down form for scuba divers only, with no retail or snorkel business for cruise line clientele. Coni says he couldn't do it without the support of the former owner Mervyn Cumber, who is renting him the boats and space for the business. (*Cayman Compass*)

Tempers Flare in Massachusetts. Residents of Back Beach, Rockport, MA are so hacked off with divers clanging tanks together and getting changed into their wetsuits in the street, they've filed a suit in the U.S. District Court describing scuba diving as an on-going nuisance affecting their quality of life. Never mind what surfers and kayakers get up to, Rockport has historically encouraged scuba diving and is pushing for more divers, not fewer.

Ocean-Friendly but not for the U.S. We told you of the British company Fourth Element that introduced a disinfectant called GoodToDive that uses powerful oxidizing agents, but leaves a solution that can be safely discarded without damaging the aquatic environment. Effective in both fresh and seawater, it's available in powder form and can be used safely to disinfect masks, regulators, and B.C.s. However, the company has not been able to export it to the U.S. and is currently investigating ways to manufacture it here. www.goodtodive.com

A Step Backwards in Conservation of the Reefs. The City of Key West's 2019 ban on the sale of sunscreens containing oxybenzone and octinoxate to protect its coral reef was set to take effect January 1, 2021, but a new law, instigated by Florida Gov. DeSantis, strikes down that ban and prohibits similar ones. Common chemicals in sunscreens and cosmetics are highly toxic to marine life and "even very low concentrations" of oxybenzone and octinoxate accumulate in coral tissue, inducing bleaching, damaging coral DNA and deforming and killing young coral larvae, according to NOAA. So much for *Undercurrent* and others campaigning to get it banned nationwide. (*Eco Watch*)

Still Want to Travel? Consider the predicament of Roman Trofimov, from Estonia, who landed in Manila airport from Bangkok on March 20, but was denied access to the country as entry visas were no longer being issued. The airline he had traveled with, AirAsia, was then unable to return him to Thailand, and he was told he would have to wait for Enhanced Community Quarantine to be over before he could depart. He's been trapped in the airport now for more than 110 days. (*Metro London*)

Max, We're Gonna Miss You. Those of us who saw him recently were shocked to hear Max Benjamin, the much-loved operator of the Walindi Plantation Resort, New Britain, PNG, has died after a long battle with an illness he kept concealed from all but the closest to him. He is survived by his wife Cecilie and son Cheyne.

Fish Bombing Continues in Malaysia. A secondary effect of the Covid-19 pandemic might be giving the marine eco-system a well-deserved rest but not in the waters off North Borneo, it seems. Local divers were shocked recently when they heard the loud blasts of fish bombs detonating during a scuba-diving jaunt off the Sabah island of Mantanani. According to a study conducted by the Marine Research Foundation, the Mantanani Islands are an important nursery for turtles from Sandakan, Terengganu and Sarawak, as well as the Sulu Sea off the Philippines. Since 2006, the foundation has caught and tagged 645 turtles. Fish bombs can also kill divers. (*New Straits Times*)

Aggressive Seaweed Endangers Reefs. Researchers have discovered a species of seaweed *Chondria tumulosa* that is rapidly spreading across one of the remotest ocean environments, rolling across the Pacific Ocean floor and burying reefs in a thick matting of vegetation and threatening vast areas of coral. With individual mats of seaweed as big as several soccer fields, researchers say the algae could dramatically alter Pearl and Herme's reefs and threaten the entire Hawaiian archipelago if it spreads. It's unknown why the algae is growing so fast and how it reached such a remote place. [See here for details.](#)

The Vanishing Sharks of South Africa. Those operating cage diving from Cape Town are concerned that this year no great white sharks have been seen -- not a single one. Their absence could be the most dramatic environmental change there in 20 years. Not long ago the sheer numbers gathering around one island off the stunning curve of sand just east of the Cape of Good Hope made it the great white capital of the world. Longline fishing, pollution, the arrival of orcas – what's causing these crowd-drawing sharks to shun these waters?

Stay Safe –

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Undercurrent May Issue

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