**Great Pacific Garbage Patch Swimmer Collects Data On Microplastics**

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is the world's largest accumulation of marine plastic debris. It's estimated to be twice the size of Texas, holding more than 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic. Well, this summer, one intrepid swimmer and environmental advocate has decided to swim through it.

Ben Lecomte is swimming through the polluted stretch of ocean between Hawaii and California in hopes of better understanding more about the garbage that's accumulated there. He's been documenting the experience in real time. The effort is called the Vortex Swim, and Ben, along with a team of scientists, sailors and photographers, will be tracking and collecting data for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center and several other groups. And we're joined now by Ben Lecomte, who's currently on his boat in the Pacific Ocean.

Welcome.

BEN LECOMTE: Thank you for having me.

MCCAMMON: So tell us where exactly you are right now and what it looks like.

LECOMTE: Right now, we are about at midpoint between Hawaii and San Francisco, so it's about a thousand mile away from those cities.

MCCAMMON: A lot of the plastic in the oceans, we know, is broken down into small pieces. But I've read that, as you swim, you find larger objects. What's the strangest thing you've run across?

LECOMTE: Yes, that's correct. Most of it is broken down, so it is very difficult to see it with a naked eye. You have to have a net, a fisher net, to tow and then contact all those micro pieces. But when I swim, we see bigger debris - lot of fishing equipment like the nets and the crates, but also household items. We have found toothbrushes. We have found bottle of waters. We have found bottles of shampoos, and even a shoe - a sort of a shoe. So we find everything that we are using at home right here.

MCCAMMON: Yeah. And you said that these microplastics - these tiny, broken-down pieces - even stick to you while you swim. I mean, what does this tell us about the bigger picture, the effects of this patch of garbage in the ocean?

LECOMTE: Yes. What we are doing here - we were not scientists, so we collect data and also that the scientists can do better work out there on assessing how all those microplastic accumulate there and what type of microplastic, what type of (unintelligible) And also, you know, the plastic has a property of holding onto pollutants. So since wildlife mistakes the plastic for food and eat them, it goes into their meat and goes up the food chain. And we are at the end of the food chain also. So it's not only in the wildlife and the ocean but us at the same time as well.

MCCAMMON: And, of course, you're far from alone in swimming through the ocean. What do we know about how the marine life that lives there is interacting with these plastics?

LECOMTE: Yeah, it's very interesting to see that. Anytime you see big debris, you are going to have an entire ecosystem created around it. So the debris that we find that are far off on the coast but yet we find species that are leaving usually (unintelligible). So it means that plastic become a medium for them to enter new areas and they become (unintelligible) spaces. And it's true for, like, fish and so on but also small organisms that we cannot see with naked eyes. So the plastic has a bad impact on sea life because of that particular property that they bring other species into a new ecosystem.

MCCAMMON: That's swimmer Ben Lecomte. He's currently swimming through the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and documenting his experience. Thank you.

LECOMTE: Well, thank you very much for your (unintelligible).