

Historic Pollution Settlement Awards \$1 Million to Nurdle Patrol

The Mission-Aransas Research Reserve's Nurdle Patrol documented plastic pellet pollution, evidence used to help reach an unprecedented \$50 million settlement of a Clean Water Act lawsuit.

Formosa Plastics Corporation USA has agreed to pay \$50 million to settle a lawsuit over pollution via plastic pellets, known as “nurdles,” from one of its Texas factories. This is reported to be the largest settlement ever brought by private citizens under the federal Clean Water Act. The payout includes \$1 million to support the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve's Nurdle Patrol, which documents coastal plastic pellet pollution and played a key role in supplying evidence for the lawsuit. Funds also support continued nurdle data collection and the expansion of Nurdle Patrol volunteer trainings throughout the Gulf Coast.

The San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper led the private citizens' lawsuit against Formosa.

A [NOAA Ocean Podcast](#) highlights the Nurdle Patrol's ongoing efforts and how citizen scientists can get involved. Nurdle Patrol maps used during legal proceedings illustrated the higher plastic pellet concentrations found in and around the Formosa site, compared to other plastic pellet facilities around the country. A judge ruled the company illegally released billions of plastic pellets and other pollutants into Lavaca Bay and other waterways. The bulk of the financial settlement will fund environmental mitigation in the region where this facility is located. The company also agreed to stop all discharge of plastics.

Since 2018, Nurdle Patrol volunteers have combed shoreline and nearshore areas to count and properly dispose of hundreds of thousands of pellets, submitting the findings [online](#). The top 20 highest nurdle concentrations on the Texas coast have all been collected from bay areas, mainly Galveston Bay. The highest concentration of pellets collected in a 10-minute period by one person has been 30,846 pellets in Galveston Bay.

Nurdles can pose hazards to marine animals that mistake them for food. While the environmental impact of nurdles is not fully understood, researchers at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute have already found that pellets collected by the Nurdle Patrol attract and absorb both bacteria and harmful chemicals, which include cancer-causing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The institute manages, and partners with, the Mission-Aransas Research Reserve. (2019)

More Information: [Nurdle Patrol](#)

Partners: Mission-Aransas Research Reserve, San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, and University of Texas Marine Science Institute