

Dutch group says it will soon start cleaning up ocean trash

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Dutch university dropout Bojan Slat, who founded the The Ocean Cleanup, answers questions during an interview prior to a press presentation in Utrecht, Netherlands, Thursday, May 11, 2017. The foundation aiming to rid the world's oceans of plastic says it will start cleaning up the huge patch of floating junk known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the next 12 months, two years ahead of schedule. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

A Dutch foundation aiming to rid the world's oceans of plastic waste

says it will start cleaning up the huge area of floating junk known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the next 12 months, two years earlier than planned.

The Ocean Cleanup aims to use long-distance floating booms that act like coastlines to gather [plastic](#) as it drifts on or near the surface of the water while allowing sea life to pass underneath. The plan originally was to anchor the barriers to the sea bed with a system used by oil rigs, but the organization said Thursday it now will use anchors that float beneath the water's surface, making it much more efficient.

The Ocean Cleanup, founded by Dutch university dropout Boyan Slat, announced that testing of the first system will start off the U.S. West coast by the end of the year and barriers will be shipped to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch between California and Hawaii in the first half of 2018, two years ahead of the organization's earlier schedule. The patch is a huge area of the ocean where swirling currents concentrate the trash.

"At the ocean cleanup we always work with nature. So instead of going after the plastic, we let the plastic come to us, saving time, energy and cost," Slat, a shaggy-haired 22-year-old, told The Associated Press.



People prepare for the press conference of the Ocean Cleanup foundation in Utrecht, Netherlands, Thursday, May 11, 2017. The foundation aiming to rid the world's oceans of plastic says it will start cleaning up the huge patch of floating junk known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the next 12 months, two years ahead of schedule. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

Floating barriers concentrate the plastic garbage at a central point where it can be fished out of the water and shipped back to dry land for recycling.

The organization discovered that the barriers are more efficient if they are allowed to slowly drift instead of anchoring them to the sea bed.

Free-floating barriers begin to act like the plastic they aim to snare, so "the cleanup systems will automatically gravitate to those places where most plastic is," Slat said. "And that now causes the efficiency to be a lot higher because there is just more plastic in front of these systems and therefore we can now clean up 50 percent of the patch in just five years'

time."



Plastic garbage is displayed prior to a press conference of the Ocean Cleanup foundation in Utrecht, Netherlands, Thursday, May 11, 2017. The foundation aiming to rid the world's oceans of plastic says it will start cleaning up the huge patch of floating junk known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the next 12 months, two years ahead of schedule. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

The innovative system is the brainchild of Slat, who decided to dedicate himself to cleaning up the world's oceans after he went scuba diving in Greece at the age of 16 and saw more plastic bags than fish.

The young entrepreneur's system is making waves among America's super-rich philanthropists. Last month, his foundation announced it had raised \$21.7 million in donations since November, clearing the way for large-scale trials at sea. Among donors were Salesforce.com CEO Marc

Benioff and PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel.

Nancy Wallace, director of the Marine Debris Program at the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said much of the garbage in the world's oceans is found throughout the water column—at different depths. That would likely put some of it out of reach of Slat's barriers.



A man preparing the stage for a presentation passes the anchors of a plastic collecting system suspended from the roof of a building in Utrecht, Netherlands, Thursday, May 11, 2017. The Ocean Cleanup foundation aiming to rid the world's oceans of plastic says it will start cleaning up the huge patch of floating junk known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the next 12 months, two years ahead of schedule. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

However she applauded The Ocean Cleanup for bringing the issue to a broad public.

"The more people are aware of it, the more they will be concerned about it," Wallace said. "My hope is that the next step is to say 'what can I do to stop it?' and that's where prevention comes in."

The organization's barriers don't catch tiny plastic particles floating in the ocean, but Slat says that by scooping up larger garbage like fishing nets, crates and other rubbish, they prevent those items breaking down into smaller particles that can be eaten by fish and other wildlife.

"Of course we will never get every last piece of plastic out of the [ocean](#)," Slat said. "There will always be a size that's too small to clean up but it's really about cleaning up the bulk—as much as possible for as little costs as possible."



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Dutch university dropout Bojan Slat, who founded the The Ocean Cleanup, poses for a portrait next to a pile of plastic garbage prior to a press presentation in Utrecht, Netherlands, Thursday, May 11, 2017. The foundation aiming to rid the world's oceans of plastic says it will start cleaning up the huge patch of floating junk known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the next 12 months, two years ahead of schedule. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



Dutch university dropout Bojan Slat, who founded the Ocean Cleanup project, poses for a portrait next to the anchors of his plastic collecting system, suspended from the roof of a building in Utrecht, Netherlands, Thursday, May 11, 2017. The foundation aiming to rid the world's oceans of plastic says it will start cleaning up the huge patch of floating junk known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the next 12 months, two years ahead of schedule. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



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