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Disaster averted... until next time



It should have been just another beautiful evening at Moon Dunes Beach last Wednesday for TERC Education Program Manager Alison Toy. But on this particular evening, something caught her eye. Thousands of tiny styrofoam balls (polystyrene pellets) littered the shoreline. "Initially, I didn't know what I was looking at," says Toy, "but upon closer inspection, my heart sank." Moments later, she pulled out

the source of this pollution out of the lake. It was a pink, deformed and punctured mesh toy still a quarter full of pellets; a [Big Joe Pool Petz Noodle Butterfly](#).

While frantically trying to corral the pellets she began to sound the alarm via social media. Within a few hours her posts were shared with over 50,000 people and by the next day, thanks to the efforts of many, the mess was almost completely gone. *Almost*, upon return when she peered closely, a scattering of pellets remained sprinkled throughout the sand and water. Knowing that these pellets could easily be ingested by fish and birds, or break down into even tinier pieces to become [microplastic pollution](#), she painstakingly hand-removed as many of the remaining pellets as she could find.



Clearly, there are irresponsible people who simply leave their mess behind, be it a Big Joe or the trash from their lunch. But is it equally irresponsible to purchase the plastic pellet-filled float in the first place? Will anyone keep it forever? It does not take much imagination to guess the ultimate fate of such an item and see how destructive these pellets could be in any environment. Or perhaps the fault lies with businesses such as [Costco](#), [Target](#), and [Walmart](#) that choose to sell them in the first place. We can argue who to blame or we can all simply choose to be more thoughtful and make our purchases more wisely.

Hopefully Big Joe's time has come...and gone.

TERC Microplastics Story Map

Questions? Email tercinfo@ucdavis.edu

