

## TAVERN OF THE SEAS

david biggs

# The problem is you

**O**NE OF the huge problems besetting our planet is the frightening build-up of plastic waste across the whole world.

Not long ago activists were marching in protest against nuclear power. “No Nukes” was a fashionable slogan and protesters could quote figures to say how long it took to break down nuclear waste.

Today plastic waste is causing a problem far more serious than anything the “No Nukes” marchers even dreamt about.

Millions of tons of plastic finds its way into the sea, destroying marine life and forming vast plastic continents in the middle of the oceans. Nobody seems able to stop the toxic flow.

A few concerned people shun plastic bags and insist on paper bags for their shopping, and a handful of restaurants are offering paper drinking straws, but these are tiny drops in the oceans of plastic waste.

They may make you feel good for a while, but they’re making no significant difference.

What we need is a project that

will take tons – not grams – of plastic out of circulation. I read a Facebook post in which a concerned Canadian said: “The problem isn’t plastic, it’s people.”

He’s right. We have to find better ways to get rid of all that waste. The trouble with plastic is that it is too versatile and too cheap.

We use it in every part of our daily lives. Without moving from your chair as you read this column, you could probably stretch out a hand and touch three different kinds of plastic. Try it.

I was intrigued to learn about the town of Burnside, in Nova Scotia, Canada, where they are using old plastic shopping bags as part of the paving material for parking areas.

They’ve worked out how to replace up to 25 percent of the bitumen in the paving mixture with plastic bags. It’s no cheaper than conventional bitumen, the developers say, but it’s slightly more flexible, so it should be resistant to freezing and heat and last longer.

The point is that two tons of plastic shopping bags went into the paving of that one parking lot.

Imagine how much plastic could be used as paving material in our national road network.

Roadworks are always happening (and here in the south peninsula there are many kilometres of road under construction as we speak). Perhaps some enterprising member of the city council could get in touch with the Nova Scotia public works department and find out how to turn plastic bags into road paving material.

We might also consider the possibility of using plastic bags to create building materials – roofing sheets, wall panels, door and window frames. We have to think up ways to keep it out of the sea.

### Last Laugh

A magazine publisher received the following letter: “Dear Sirs, a year ago you offered me a year’s subscription to your publication, saying that if I was not satisfied after a year you would refund my money.

“I am not satisfied. Please refund my subscription fee.

“On second thoughts, to save you the trouble, just deduct it from next year’s subscription.”