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Contact: Lisa Andree

Plastic Ocean Project

910-431-8852

[lisa@plasticoceanproject.org](mailto:lisa@plasticoceanproject.org)

**Local Nonprofit Faces Hurdle Due to Power Surge**

WILMINGTON, NC-November 27, 2023-Plastic Ocean Project, a local nonprofit that strives to solve the problems of plastic pollution, was dealt a blow this past June when a power surge severely damaged its key piece of lab equipment. Despite insurance and  
surge protectors, POP’s Microscopic Fourier-Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (u-FTIR)  
instrument-one of only a few along the east coast, is now in need of expensive repairs.

The u-FTIR is a highly specialized instrument that uses the same imaging as  
the James Webb Space telescope. According to POP’s Lab Director, Kayla

West, it can determine what a microscopic particle is composed of. This makes quantifying and identifying microplastics in environmental samples more accurate. West notes, “When we can identify these plastics with the highest confidence, we improve our data reporting and add to the collective of scientific knowledge regarding microplastic pollution. This is important in understanding the scope of plastic in the environment, our food, and drinking water.”

Since June, this unprecedented emergency has resulted in missed opportunities  
for collaboration with corporations and universities that in turn help finance POP's work.  
Students have been denied critical hands-on experience and some have been forced to switch projects due to honor's theses deadlines. These circumstances have led the nonprofit to create a “Research Recovery” effort for GivingTuesday in order to raise funds to repair the u-FTIR. GivingTuesday is a one-day fundraising event on November 28th. It’s a time when communities make a concerted extra effort to support nonprofits.

POP’s director, Bonnie Monteleone reflects, “Since opening our doors here in 2019, we  
have given thousands of students the opportunity to conduct research, participate in  
educational programs, and express their passion to protect nature from plastic pollution through art. Also, this year with over 860 volunteers, our \*Trees4Trash tri-county cleanups have kept over 6.5 tons of trash from flowing into the ocean, area creeks, rivers and waterways. Typically, nonprofits that conduct cleanups do not have a lab space to work on the front end of this problem. Furthermore, by providing lab experience and u-FTIR training, POP bolsters many of these students’ resumes and provides letters of recommendation to those seeking further education.”

The nonprofit’s GivingTuesday goal is $20,000. To learn more or to donate, please visit: <https://www.plasticoceanproject.org/givingtuesday.html>

\*POP’s Trees4Trash initiative: one tree is planted for every 25 pounds of trash that POP collects. For

2024, over 530 trees are slated to be planted throughout Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties.