

# Planet PK Champions: Gutta Percha

## What is Gutta Percha?

Gutta Percha is a hard, tough, heat resistant, plastic material.

## Where does it come from?

Gutta Percha comes from trees of the Sapotaceae family in South East Asia.

## What was it used for?

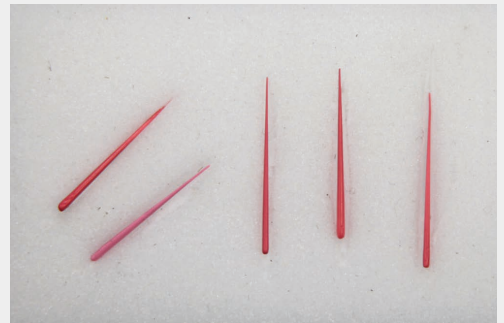
The telegraph industry used it to insulate cables under the sea. It has also been used for making golf balls and in root canal fillings in dentistry.

## What important properties does it have?

Gutta Percha is very water resistant. It was very important in global communications as it enabled the early telegraph cables to go under the sea.

## What are the environmental impacts of Gutta Percha

As Gutta Percha was so important, the telegraph companies owned their own plantations of trees in South East Asia from which Gutta Percha was extracted. Each tree only produces a little bit of Gutta Percha, but the whole tree had to be cut down to get it. Extracting Gutta Percha from trees therefore lead to mass deforestation.



EXTRACTION OF GUTTA FROM THE TRUNK IN SUMATRA.



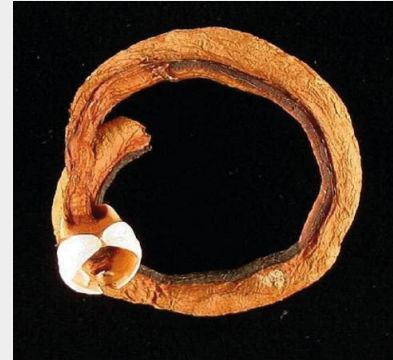
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## Why is deforestation bad?

Trees are really important for the planet for many reasons. Forests are home for many animals. They clean the air we breathe and produce oxygen. They clean the soil, absorbing chemicals that are harmful. They are also able to reduce global warming as they absorb carbon dioxide in their leaves, roots and wood. Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas that causes global warming.

## Fun Fact:

A small fish-like worm called *Teredo Navalis* or Naval Shipworm ate the Gutta Percha on undersea cables causing them to fail.



THE STATION-ELECTRICIAN'S NIGHTMARE.



(Note the teredo full of admiration and astonishment).

Drawn by M. G. Skipper.