



Image Credits: Greenpeace

#PlasticFreePresident

Media Guide

It's a critical moment. The world faces an indisputable plastic pollution crisis. More than 99% of plastic is created from chemicals sourced from fossil fuels, including an oversupply of fracked gas, which is spurring a global boom in new plastic production. That plastic is causing serious environmental problems at every step of its lifecycle. President Biden can tackle this crisis with the stroke of a pen.

That's why 600+ organizations have signed onto the [#PlasticFreePresident platform](#) calling on President Biden to take the 8 actions outlined in the platform to tackle the plastic pollution crisis.

We've prepared this guide to help you write effective pieces in support of the #PlasticFreePresident platform. If you have any questions or would like an additional pair of eyes on your piece, please contact sprufer@biologicaldiversity.org and we will help.

Table of Contents

- I. [Options for media](#)
 - A. [Letters to the editor](#)
 - B. [Op-Eds](#)
 - C. [Blog Posts](#)
 - D. [Editorials](#)
- II. [Talking points](#)

I.

I. Options for Media

There are a few different ways you can get the word out about the Presidential Plastics Action Plan:

A. Letters to the Editor (LTE)

- a. 125-175 words
- b. Brief and focused
- c. Typically respond to articles that a newspaper has already run

B. Opinion pieces, also called Op-eds

- a. Narrative essay that presents an opinion on an issue
- b. Published in newspapers, magazines and web outlets
- c. Typically under 600 words
- d. Can be submitted by the publication's readers

C. Blog posts or other self-publishing sites like [Medium](#)

- a. Generally follow the same style as op-eds
- b. Can include more creative media, like lists, pictures, and videos

D. Editorials

- a. Written by the newspaper's editorial staff
- b. Must be approved by the newspaper's "editorial board"
- c. You can "pitch" an article or idea to the editorial board

These forms of media do important things, including raising awareness, responding to new developments, sending a message to lawmakers, energizing supporters, and persuading community members. An article in support of the #PlasticFreePresident platform will raise awareness and bring political support for action on plastics.

A. LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Composing a Letter to the Editor

Remember, most letters to the editor need to be short (125 to 175 words), so make your point quickly and clearly.

Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- **Be brief. Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting.**
- **Tell your story and make it personal.** Express your concern about the issue in your own way. Refer to facts, but write the letter in your own words.
- **Make it local, timely, and relevant.** Your letter is more likely to be printed if it's localized and/or it is in response to something that the paper has already covered.
- **Be concise and pick an angle.** Make one clear point – after you pick your point, stick to it.
- **Make a call to action.** Be bold!
- **Refer to the decision maker you are trying to influence by name.** Then be sure to follow up with the decision maker if your letter is printed.
- **Check for proper grammar and spelling.**
- **Sign with your full name and include your contact information, including your mailing address** (newspapers won't publish that address, but they typically want it to help verify that you're a real person).

Submitting your Letter to the Editor

1. Decide which paper to submit your letter to. Newspapers want to hear from their readership so pick a local paper.
2. Look up the letter to the editor guidelines on that paper's website - every outlet will have slightly different requirements.
3. Write and submit your letter according to the instructions on their website.

Once your Letter to the Editor is published

- Share on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with the hashtag [#PlasticFreePresident](#) and [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#).
- Send any letters that get published to sprufer@biologicaldiversity.org so we can share and help amplify on social media.

Sample Letter to the Editor

- Check out this Letter to the Editor in the [Delaware State News](#) as an example.

B. OP-EDS

Composing an Op-Ed

Most op-eds are under 600 words, but check your newspaper for specific word count guidelines. Typically, op-eds only have one author.

The tips for LTEs apply to op-eds as well, but here are some additional tips for op-eds:

- **Be informal:** Write as if you're debating with someone you know. Don't use overcomplicated language. Keep the language clear and concise by using short declarative sentences, not long sentences with lots of commas. Use your own words rather than language copied from others.
- **State your position early on.** Establish your perspective and what your connection is to the issue. Then use the rest of the op-ed to back up your position with facts and anecdotes.
- **Keep it simple.** Have one strong opinion and use facts and examples to back up that opinion.
- **Be relevant** to the current news cycle. What's happening now that ties into your issue?
- **Stay local.** Aim to submit your op-ed to a local or regional paper to increase your chances of getting it published. (National publications often receive hundreds of letters a day).
- **Basic format:**
 - Headline and byline: Write a short headline that sums up your piece or highlights your key argument. Put your byline under that.
 - Lead paragraph: grab readers right away with your opinion. Make your main point clear in the first paragraph and save the background info for lower in the op-ed.
 - Good hooks include:
 - Recent news
 - A personal story
 - Popular culture reference
 - A new study
 - Humor to point out a contradiction
 - Supporting paragraphs: build on your main point using facts and examples. Hyperlink to supporting articles when you make a claim that might seem questionable to readers or the editor.
 - Wrap it up: sum up your point, bring it back to a call to action.

Submitting your Op-Ed

1. Choose which news outlet you want to submit your op-ed to and check that outlet's requirements for op-eds on their website
 - a. Generally, there will either be a submission form on the website or an email for you to submit the op-ed to.
 - b. If you email your op-ed, be sure to paste your piece into the body of the email rather than attaching a Word document (attachments can trigger an editor's Spam filter).

- c. Above your piece, it's helpful to include a brief note (E.g., "Hi: Would you have any interest in my op-ed about X? I've pasted it below. This would be exclusive to your paper. Please let me know if you have any questions. Sincerely, etc.")
- d. Be sure to include your contact information.

Once your Op-Ed is published

- Share on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook with the hashtag [#PlasticFreePresident](#)
- Send your op-ed to sprufer@biologicaldiversity.org so we can share it widely!
- It can be competitive to get your op-ed published -- don't be discouraged if it's not published. You can always self-publish your opinion piece on a blog, an organization's website, or a Medium page (see "[Blog Posts](#)" below).

Sample Op-Ed

- Check out this op-ed in [the Hill](#) as an example.

C. BLOG POSTS/SELF PUBLISHING

It can be competitive to get op-eds published. An alternative way to get your opinion piece out there is to self-publish it on a blog, an organization's website, or a page like Medium.

Once you publish your piece, use social media to amplify and share it, using the hashtags [#PlasticFreePresident](#) and [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#). Send your piece to sprufer@biologicaldiversity.org so we can help amplify on other platforms.

Composing a Blog Post

- **Structure:** Blog posts can follow the same structure as op-eds. See the tips in the [op-ed section](#).
- **Hyperlink:** The benefit of self-publishing online is that you can hyperlink claims to other articles and sources of information. Make use of this to back up your arguments!
- **Videos and images:** Include images and videos in your post to provide readers with another way to understand the arguments you are making. Make sure to give the photographers and videographers appropriate credit. You can find free-to-use pictures on [pexels.com](#), [pixabay.com](#), or [flickr.com](#), often indicated by a Creative Commons license.

Sample

- Check out this piece on [Medium](#) as an example.

D. EDITORIALS

Editorials are written by the staff and editors of news outlets. An editorial can help the issue (plastics) and the solution you are demanding (presidential action) get the attention it deserves.

How to pitch an editorial

- You can pitch topics to the editor, opinion editor, editorial page editor, or news columnists of a news outlet.
- Find the editorial board email address on the news outlet's website. News columnists sometimes list their contact info at the bottom of their columns.
- Send a formal pitch (1-2 page email letter). State the position you want the editorial to take and tell them why it's urgent and timely. Provide evidence for your arguments and background resources, like plasticfreepresident.org and articles about the impacts of plastics.

Sample pitch

Plastic pollution and increasing U.S. plastic production are major public health threats that need to be addressed by the federal government. So we're asking the Hometown Times to write an editorial outlining the problem and advocating for solutions like the President Plastics Action Plan, which is being supported by over 600 groups from our community and around the country. The plan outlines eight executive actions that President Biden can take immediately without any help from Congress, including blocking approval of new plastic-making projects and using federal purchasing power to reduce plastic waste. You can find details on the plan at www.plasticfreepresident.com, including information on the plastic pollution crisis. You can also find experts to interview on the [press release](#) or I'm happy to help connect you with other sources. Thanks for your consideration.

Joe Citizen, my contact information

Sample editorial

- Check out the sample editorial about plastics from the [LA Times](#).

2. Talking Points

Please put op-eds and letters to the editor in your own words. See below a list of potential talking points you can review to inspire your own original language on these issues. Please don't copy these points; instead, please use them to spark your own writing.

Quick tip: Frame your writing around the problem of plastic pollution, and use the [#PlasticFreePresident Platform](#) as a way President Biden can take action on the problem. Connect with what is local and relevant to your community, both the problem of plastic pollution and the solution of having executive action.

Harms of plastic

- Plastic production fuels the climate crisis and damages local communities where plastic is made with toxic air and water pollution.
- Plastics are a threat to human health. Plastics contain chemicals that are linked to many public health problems, like obesity and cancer.
- Plastic clogs our rivers and oceans, harms and kills wildlife and persists in our environment for centuries.
- Each of the actions described requires the president to prioritize support for communities that historically have been harmed "first and worst" by the petrochemical industrial sector and the waste it creates: communities of color, Indigenous communities, and impoverished communities.

President must take action

- President Biden can take the eight steps in the #PlasticFreePresident platform without action from Congress.
- This will set the nation on a pathway to a plastic pollution-free future.

Ask #1: Use federal purchasing power to reduce plastic pollution

- Federal spending should be used to reduce plastic pollution instead of making it worse. The U.S. government is the country's biggest purchaser, so policies requiring less single-use plastics could create a new standard for all industries.
- U.S. taxpayers shouldn't pay for plastic packaging that ends up in our oceans, landscapes and landfills. The president should instead require all federal contractors and vendors to stop using single-use plastics and make less plastic waste.

Ask #2: Block increased plastic production

- We can't allow the fossil fuel industry to keep turning cheap fracked gas into mountains of throwaway plastic. Presidential leadership can slow down this rush to fill our oceans, landscapes and landfills with plastic and study the impacts of plastic pollution before it's too late.
- Americans are the biggest culprit in the plastic pollution crisis so it's our job to help fix it. The president must reinstate the oil export ban and stop exporting both our plastic ("recycling") waste

and the nurdles that build throwaway plastic products and packaging.

Ask #3: Reject false solutions

- The plastic-making industry has lied about plastic recycling and alternatives for decades. Like Big Oil and Big Tobacco, we need to hold the petrochemical industry responsible for its pollution and harm to public health and not trust its greenwashing campaigns now.
- The president should place tariffs on all plastic products and packaging. Putting a price on plastic pollution will also encourage companies to use less plastic packaging.
- "Chemical Recycling", "Advanced Recycling", "Waste to Energy" "Pyrolysis", "Plastic in Roads to name a few, are merely a continuation of business as usual and a transfer of plastic pollution to plastic pollutants into our soil, air, and water (and bodies).

Ask #4: Advance environmental justice

- Plastic-making petrochemical plants are usually sited in poor communities of color, often where residents are already sickened by exposure to other industrial pollution. We need the president to stand up for environmental justice and take actions showing that black lives matter.
- Federal agencies must make racial justice a top priority when approving permits, require the best available pollution control technologies, continuously and transparently monitor fence-line pollution, and take quick enforcement action when pollution limits are exceeded.

Ask #5: Science-based regulations

- The decades-old regulations on plastic production don't protect our communities or environment. The president should require new rules based on good science and actively enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Plastic pervades our environment and even our bodies, comprising public health as it carries toxins through the food web. The president should classify plastic pollution as hazardous waste and regulate it accordingly.

Ask #6: Fix finances that promote plastic pollution

- Massive U.S. subsidies of the fossil fuel industry support the creation of plastic pollution. We need to funnel those planet-wrecking investments into green alternatives and waste reduction. The president must lead that long-overdue transition.
- The flawed finances of fracked gas encourage its overproduction and conversion into plastic. To address climate change and the plastic pollution crisis, we need national leadership to phase out fossil fuels and stop making plastics.

Ask #7: Build international coalition

- Plastic pollution is a global crisis that requires an international response. The president must ratify plastic treaties like the Basel Convention on hazardous waste and negotiate binding treaties that ban single-use plastics and reduce plastic production and consumption.
- Americans create more plastic pollution than almost anyone on earth, but we've been misled by phony promises about plastic recycling, which gets exported to developing countries. Less than 10 percent of plastic is actually recyclable and we need to stop dumping our waste to poor countries, from which it often ends up in the ocean.

Ask #8: Prevent and collect lost fishing gear

- The fishing industry loses tons of plastic nets, lines and other fishing gear every year, which litter our oceans and entangle and choke marine life. The president should require changes in fishing practices and penalties for lost gear.
- Derelict fishing gear has been accumulating in our oceans for decades and we need to remove this threat to whales and other marine life. The president should work with federal agencies, states and Congress to create aggressive gear removal programs and regulations to limit the impacts of this fishing gear.