

Key facts and information

What's the current state of the plastic pollution crisis

- About 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic has been produced since the 1950s - the weight of roughly a billion elephants or 47 million blue whales.^[1]
- Only about 9% of this plastic has been recycled, 12% has been burned and the remaining 79% has ended up in landfills or the environment.^[2]
- Up to 12.7 million tonnes of plastic enters the oceans every year.^[3]
- The equivalent of a truckload of plastic enters the oceans every minute.^[4]
- There are five trillion pieces of plastic in our oceans^[5] – enough to circle the Earth over 400 times.^[6]
- Countries like Canada, the US and the UK export plastic waste to various countries in Asia and Africa⁷⁻⁹, offloading their trash problem to other communities.

Who is most impacted by plastic pollution

- Scientists have documented 700 marine species affected by ocean plastic.^[10]
- Up to 9 of 10 seabirds^[11], 1 in 3 sea turtles^[12] and more than half of whale and dolphin species have ingested plastic.^[13]
- In the Canadian Arctic, 87% of birds have ingested plastics of some sort.^[14]
- Crustaceans tested at the ocean's deepest point, Mariana Trench, had ingested plastic.^[15]
- People living along rivers and coastlines in China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam are the most impacted by plastic pollution.^[16]
- [Low income communities face more health impacts near plastic production sites, have greater exposure to toxins and waste, and bear the brunt of the impacts of improper plastic disposal and incineration.](#)^[17]
- Henderson Island in the South Pacific is the most plastic polluted of any island recorded to date.^[18]
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Who's to blame for this problem

- Annual plastic production has skyrocketed since the early 1950s, reaching 322 million tonnes in 2015. This does not include synthetic fibers used in clothing, rope and other products which accounted for 61 million tonnes in 2016. It is expected that plastic production will continue to increase, likely doubling by 2025.^[19]
- Drink companies alone produce over 500 billion single-use plastic bottles annually.^[20]
- Well known coffee company Starbucks produces 4 billion coffee cups each year.^[21]

- Tens of billions of bags of chips are sold each year by companies like Pepsi Co.^[22]

What are real solutions

- Government bans and restrictions for unnecessary and damaging plastic products or activities. Legislative reuse targets.
- Mandated Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations and strategies to make producers and companies responsible for the damage plastic causes to our environment, make them accountable for the entire life cycle and true costs of their products.
- Government and corporate investment in reuse models and new ways to deliver products using less or no packaging.
- Corporate phase out of production and use of single-use plastic products and throwaway product models.
- A shift in dominant public mindsets away from our throwaway culture focused on convenience being equal to disposal, toward a vision of healthy, sustainable and more connected communities.

What are false solutions

- Bioplastics - not as green as they seem, approach with caution. Though companies often market them under the same umbrella, a product is not necessarily biodegradable and may require very specific conditions to break down. They also do not solve the litter or throwaway culture problem.^[23]
- Incineration - creates other pollution and does not address the overproduction problem.^[24]
- Focusing on end of life like recycling or disposal - we can't recycle our way out of this crisis.^[25]
- Clean up - while clean up efforts help reduce litter problems, they do not address the source of the problem and ignore the unseen plastic pollution - microplastics.^[26]
- Throwaway alternatives - replacing one single-use item with another does not necessarily solve the problem or help to address our throwaway culture.

Who is championing solutions

- Around the world, various cities, countries and regions are banning or proposing bans on different single-use plastics like Morocco's bag ban^[27], Seattle, U.S.'s straw ban^[28], and the City of Vancouver, Canada's proposed coffee cup and styrofoam container ban.^[29]
- More than 30 countries have either regional or country-wide bans on plastic bags, and dozens more have levied fees or taxes on disposable bags.^[30]
- UK retailer Iceland committed to go plastic free for all of its own brand products.^[31]

- Zero waste supermarkets are popping up in various cities in countries including the UK, Germany, Canada, the United States, Mexico, South Africa and more.

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