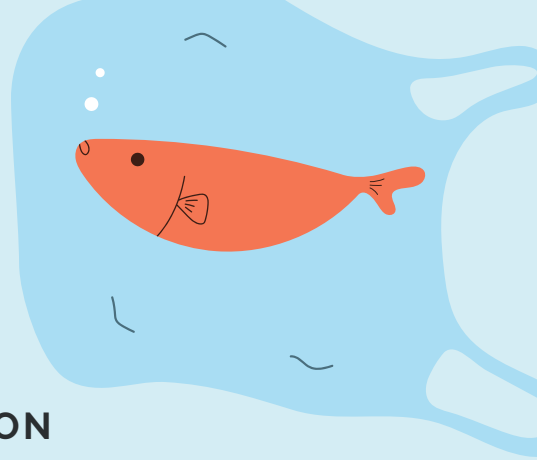


# PLASTIC FREE JULY 2023



## WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH PLASTIC POLLUTION AND WHAT CAN WE DO TO REDUCE IT?

The Plastic Free July® campaign encourages millions around the globe to be a part of the solution to plastic pollution. This month, we challenge you to increase your awareness and follow it up with ACTION! Learn where plastic pollution comes from, why it's so damaging to human and environmental health, what kind of changes you can make, and policies that can help reduce plastic pollution.

### Fast Facts

#### 33 billion pounds of plastic

enter the marine environment every single year. Today, there's an estimated 75–199 million tons of plastic waste in our oceans.

#### 91% of plastic

isn't recycled at all. Single-use plastics are especially hard to recycle & often aren't accepted by recycling centers.

#### 5-6%.

The recycling rate in the U.S. in 2021. The majority of plastic ends up in landfills or burned.

#### a polluting process.

Plastics generated 3.4% of all global emissions in 2019—1.8 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases!

#### plastic is fossil fuel.

Over 99% of plastic is made from petrochemicals sourced from fossil fuels like oil, coal, and gas.

#### 44% of plastic

is used for packaging, which is often meant for single use.

#### 500 million plastic straws

are used per day in the U.S. alone.

#### 40% of plastic products

are thrown away within 1 month of use or purchase.

#### 15 minutes.

The average "working life" of a plastic bag.

#### 500 billion plastic cups

are used worldwide, each year.

#### 29 million tons

of polystyrene (EPS) foam are produced each year.

### The Plastic Life Cycle

#### DID YOU KNOW: GREENHOUSE GASES ARE EMITTED AT EACH STAGE OF PLASTIC'S LIFE CYCLE?

Gas, oil, and coal are the fossil-fuel building blocks of almost all virgin (new) plastic produced today. The polluting processes begin with the extraction, transport, and refinement of these crude materials. Then, energy and emissions-intensive manufacturing processes convert chemicals into plastic feedstock and eventually, end-use plastic products.

After its brief use, many plastic items end up as litter, where researchers estimate it may take centuries to degrade.

Without degrading, plastic continues to break into smaller pieces which wreak havoc on entire ecosystems. Whether ingested by animals, leaching chemicals into groundwater and soil, or disrupting habitats, littered plastic has costly and long-lasting consequences.

If discarded, plastic ends up in landfills (where it also degrades for centuries), incinerators (where it is emitted as toxic, polluting fumes), or very rarely, recycled into plastic feedstock for future use.

### Health Impacts

Exposure to microplastics as well as the array of chemicals added to plastic products can be harmful to human health.

Humans ingest microplastics through food, water, skin absorption, and the air they breathe. Recent research among pregnant women in the U.S. found that they have an average of 56 different chemicals in their blood, many of which may have originated from consumer products.

Research suggests that the chemicals added during plastics processing can cause: hormonal imbalances, reproductive problems, neurological effects, and even cancer. For example, phthalates (which give plastic extra durability) is a suspected carcinogen. As is styrene, the basis of EPS foam—a popular product in food service.



### Industry Greenwashing

#### THE MYTH OF "ADVANCED RECYCLING"

Advertised as a sustainable solution to the plastic waste crisis, "advanced recycling," "chemical recycling," "chemical conversion," and pyrolysis are industry terms to describe the chemical breakdown of plastic waste. This may include chemical reactions to produce oil- or gas-like raw materials, and incineration for fuel. It is important to note that the EPA does not consider any plastic-to-fuel process to be recycling, and actually classifies pyrolysis technology as incineration under the Clean Air Act.

Yet, this highly polluting process continues to be promoted across the country as a solution to handling the overflowing plastic waste stream. Advanced recycling is not recycling, by any definition!

### It's Time to Break Up with Plastic

The best solution to our plastic pollution crisis is to make less plastic to begin with. It's true that plastic has become ubiquitous in our daily lives, attracting consumers with its convenience and the feel-good promise of "recycling." But unfortunately, plastic recycling is not as robust as its made out to be, and the plastics manufacturing industry (backed by Big Oil) continues to strengthen its grip on consumers & the economy, while turning a blind eye to the environmental damage it causes. Fortunately, there are actions to take! Break up with plastic with these first steps:

#### 1 REFUSE SINGLE-USE.

Simply put, use less single-use plastic! Bring your own bag, bottle, container, etc. with you and encourage others to do the same.

#### 2 CHOOSE TO REUSE.

Although "single-use" items make up the majority of plastic produced today, these items often have a longer lifespan than we give them. Try to reuse or repurpose items such as plastic containers or grocery bags. Opt for durable, long-lasting alternatives, when possible.

#### 3 RECYCLE CORRECTLY.

Take time to learn the accepted recyclables in your area, and research where to take special hard-to-recycle item like paint, electronics, and even plastic bags. The recycling symbol doesn't necessarily mean you can toss it in the curbside collection!

#### 4 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

What does civic engagement have to do with plastic pollution? Everything! First, it is essential that you know who represents you! Develop a relationship with your representative(s); tell them how you feel about plastic issues in your region!

Second, advocate for policies that strengthen environmental protections and reduce plastic consumption. Oppose policies which enable the plastics industry to continue producing and polluting.

#### PLASTIC POLICIES

Policies like bag bans, EPS foam bans, producer responsibility ("producer pays"), and container deposit ("bottle bill") systems all support the goals of making less plastic, reducing waste, and achieving a circular economy. Such policies are gaining popularity in cities and states across the country. However, in Virginia, laws must pass the state legislature before they can be adopted by localities. The plastic bag tax (\$0.05 fee) is one example of a recent plastic-reduction policy which has been adopted in 10 localities across the state and has already reduced the number of littered plastic bags observed there!

