

Plastic pollution and wastefulness

Business



It takes hundreds, if not thousands, of years for plastic products to decompose, yet humans come in contact with them for only a fraction of plastics' total lifespans. Consumers use plastics for their intended uses, perhaps use them again, and dispose of them, where they take up space in landfills, clog sewers, and kill animals. Because they take so long to decompose, plastics are choking the planet, and both people and the environment are paying the price. Single use plastics are being used for too many purposes, leading to a large amount of plastic waste with nowhere to go and humans' over-exposure to toxic chemicals in plastics.

Irresponsible disposal of plastics wastes precious resources, harms people, and is caused by wastefulness and lack of an environmentally responsible alternative to plastics. Until people change their attitudes about the longevity of plastics and the seriousness of every one-time use and irresponsible disposal, nothing can be done to help the environment, communities affected by flooding, and people affected by the harmful chemicals that plastics contain. Most people don't realize it, but plastic overuse is a huge problem with many far-reaching consequences. Over one billion tons of plastic have been produced over the past fifty years, and because plastic takes so long to decompose, nearly all of that plastic still exists somewhere in the environment today. The appalling amount of plastic Americans use wouldn't be a problem if it didn't take one thousand years for just one plastic bag to decompose in a landfill (Kiener).

Unfortunately, due to a lack of proper disposal methods and availability, a lot of plastic ends up not in landfills, but instead as litter. Poorly disposed of plastic bags clog sewers, leading to flooding during wet seasons, costing

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people their homes, and sometimes, their lives (Kiener 161). The plastic products that get through the sewers continue to move to larger bodies of water such as rivers, lakes, and eventually oceans. Once in the oceans, most plastic products choke and kill animals. In the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a region in the Pacific Ocean where currents come together and form a whirlpool of trash, there are about three and a half million tons of plastic waste. The most commonly found plastic waste is plastic film from packaging and plastic bags (Norlander).

According to scientists' estimates, as many as one million seabirds and one hundred thousand animals such as dolphins and sea turtles are killed each year by plastic debris, such as the trash in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (Norlander). Some people, like Capt. Charles Moore, think that it would be best if Americans stop using single use plastic products altogether in order to get rid of places such as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (Moore). Poorly disposed of plastics pose a problem to the environment, but they can also directly affect people. Plastics have many unique properties such as durability, flexibility, and transparency, but they are also able to absorb toxic chemicals that do not dissolve in water.

This means that when a plastic bag sits in a water source that has been polluted by DDT or PCBs, the plastic will absorb those chemicals. If plankton or other fish eat this plastic, the chemicals move up the food chain with the potential to poison unsuspecting humans. (Kiener 176). DDT is best known for its ability to effect animals' reproduction hormones, and this holds true for humans as well. If people, especially Americans, don't stop polluting the environment with plastic products, humans' long-term ability to reproduce

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may be compromised. So many single use plastics are improperly disposed of that serious repercussions are manifesting themselves as threats to the environment, individual communities, and the future of the human race.

Single use plastics production wastes valuable resources, and its improper disposal kills animals. Eight percent of the world's oil supply is used for the production of single-use plastics. According to Greenpeace senior scientist David Santello, " It's a huge waste of our dwindling oil reserves" (qtd. in Kiener 162). It is just not worth it to waste non-renewable resources on a product that is often thrown out after one use. Throwing out plastics wouldn't be such a big problem if there was a good way to recycle them after they are used.

Unfortunately, there is not, so once plastics are produced, they take hundreds of years to decompose. According to Anthony Andrady, a senior research scientist at North Carolina's Research Triangle Institute, " except for a small amount that has been incinerated, every bit of plastic manufactured in the world for the last fifty years or so still remains" somewhere in the environment (qtd. in Kiener 162). These poorly disposed of plastics kill many animals that mistake them for food. Plastic pieces that have been eaten by animals often puncture their digestive tracts, killing them.

Every albatross chick that has been studied on the Midway Island in the North Pacific by University of California scientist Myra Finkelstein has had plastic found in its stomach (Norlander), and if nothing is done to stop all of this plastic use and subsequent pollution, more than just birds will suffer.

Single use plastics pose a threat to the environment, but use of more durable plastics that are found commonly in homes are also a serious issue. Recently, there have been studies that suggest that chemicals commonly found in plastic are linked directly to autism (Belli). Plastics are produced using toxic chemicals such as BPA and DEHA, which have been found to migrate from plastics into foods that are stored in plastic. Heat, cold, and light all speed up the process of chemicals migrating from plastic into food. Styrofoam take-out containers are plastics that pose the biggest threat, but chemicals found in cling wrap and PVC piping have been found to have adverse effects on humans as well.

Breast cancer researchers at Tufts University found that breast cancer cells thrived in PVC plastic test tubes (Welland). In animal studies, small amounts of chemicals commonly found in cling wrap and PVC have caused genetic defects, so it is only practical to assume that these chemicals can have similar effects on humans. The FDA does its best to regulate chemical migration amounts in plastic packaging, but it allows plastics that migrate “safe amounts” of toxic chemicals into food. Most alarmingly, the FDA doesn’t regulate chemical migration limits on houseware plastic items such as eating utensils, receptacles, and other kitchen appliances. Manufacturers are advised to follow public plastic migration and additives safety guidelines, but they are not required to (Hernandez 361).

Most people are unaware of the risks of using plastics for so many day-to-day activities because they have been a staple of America’s lifestyle for so long. However, no matter the risks, American society has become dependent on plastic products and needs them to function. Many say that plastic

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overuse and the consequences that arise from it are perpetrated by a lack of environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic, and by plastics' inability to be recycled in an efficient manner. Single use plastic products make up a staple part of the American lifestyle. They are used for packaging foods and drinks, medication, as grocery bags, and in many other industries.

A huge amount of plastic waste comes from plastic grocery bags, and it has been proposed many times to use paper bags as an alternative to plastic bags. This would cut down on net pollution and chemical related hazards, but paper bags should not be used in place of plastic bags because they use more greenhouse gases to manufacture and supply. They take seventy percent more energy to produce and ninety-one percent more energy to recycle than plastic bags (Kiener 165). Paper bags are not used in place of plastic bags because they are nearly as environmentally hazardous to produce and recycle as plastic bags are when improperly disposed of. Some argue that plastic pollution exists because there are not enough readily available places to recycle plastic products. Plastic recycling is not widely available because it takes more energy to recycle plastic products than it does to produce them.

Even then, plastic products can only be downcycled, or recycled into a simpler form to be used as insulation or carpeting (Query). On the surface, it appears that the physical and chemical properties of plastics are to blame for the human and environmental problems plastics are causing, but a deeper look reveals the source of the problem. The plastics industry and the American people are to blame for the enormous amount of plastic that is polluting the environment. The plastics industry is partially responsible for all <https://assignbuster.com/plastic-pollution-and-wastefulness/>

of the plastic pollution. A representative of the Plastic Pollution Coalition believes that “ businesses, not consumers or taxpayers, should take primary responsibility for the end lives of their products.

Producer responsibility and transparency should be incorporated in the ways plastics are manufactured and disposed of” (qtd. in Kiener 167). The plastic companies are fighting back, though, stating that “ plastics don’t pollute, people do” (qtd. in Kiener 168). Ultimately, it is the consumers’ responsibility to see that they properly dispose of their own waste. The way that Americans see plastics as cheap, short-lived, and ultimately disposable points out some of the flaws in American society as a whole.

In general, Americans have trouble seeing beyond their actions and into their more far-reaching consequences, failing to see past short-term results. Americans throw away twenty-eight and a half million tons of plastic in landfills every year (Kiener 173). Instead of focusing on better alternatives, more efficient means of recycling, and pointing fingers, Americans need to learn to be more conscientious of the consequences of their needless consumption and wastefulness, or else problems like plastic overuse and pollution will continue to persist. Clearly, plastic overuse, which leads to pollution and the waste of natural resources is a problem that needs to be addressed. Animals and people die as a result of plastic pollution, and chemicals that it is manufactured with and absorbs pose a threat to human health. Even though many of the harmful results of using, wasting, and improperly disposing plastic products are caused by physical characteristics of the plastic products themselves, the plastics industry and consumer behavior are also sources of the problem.

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Foreign countries such as China, Ireland, and Mexico have already taken steps toward eliminating pollution caused by plastics (Dodd), America needs to do its part as well. Plastic companies need to clean up their act, but it is ultimately the consumer's choice whether to do the right thing and use plastic in moderation, reuse plastic that has already served its purpose, and properly dispose of plastic that has no further use or to contribute to the problem further by needless consumption, wastefulness, and disregard to the environment. Works Cited Belli, Brita. "Digging Deep." E.

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