

Plastic straw ban – a real solution or a disservice

[Environment](#), [Ecology](#)



Plastics used to be an indispensable part of our lives and we use them every day. However, the world's attitude towards plastic took a change overnight in 2015, when a viral video of a plastic straw being pulled out of a sea turtle's nose took over the Internet. Plastics, or more specifically, plastic straws, soon became a dining taboo. However, plastic straws only make up about 2, 000 tons of the total 9 million tons of plastic waste that goes into the seas annually. Thus, it brings me to think if a no straw ban helps in saving Mother Nature, or are we doing ourselves a disservice by creating more problems?

Many plastics are non-biodegradable. They break into many tiny pieces, called microplastics when it gets washed into oceans. All these microplastics will then be trapped in the ocean currents and move in a clockwise direction, forming a massive patch of accumulated marine debris, known as a garbage patch. The 1. 6 million square kilometers Great Pacific Garbage Patch is more than double the size of Texas and it will only get bigger if nothing is done to curb our irresponsible acts and help make our Earth more sustainable for our descendants for, we do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, but rather, borrow it from our children. Hence, the no straw ban is a laudable stepping stone to help the world start somewhere so that we can advance to a greener future.

That being said, the purpose of a no straw ban would then be an initiative to reduce plastic usage on a whole. However, people might slacken after they have moved away from plastic straws, thinking that they have already done their part for the environment. This is also known as the “ single action bias” and it is worrying as it shows that some of us are just going through the <https://assignbuster.com/plastic-straw-ban-a-real-solution-or-a-disservice/>

motion to ditch plastic straws without fully understanding the purpose behind it. To add on, it reflects the failure to change people's mindset and behaviors towards plastic usage and saving the environment. In that case, a no straw ban is no longer meaningful, and all the efforts will be fruitless.

Microplastics that float in water, look and smell like the prey of many marine animals. As a result, they might be misled into ingesting these toxic chemicals. Their digestive tracts will be blocked as plastics fill their stomach, causing them to lose appetite, resulting in starvation and death. We have always thought of these disposables to be insignificant. But truth be told, they bring about so much harm to our surroundings, especially to the marine animals who have to choke on plastics we dispose and swim in garbage patches formed as a result of our irresponsible acts. As of now, we might not be able to sense the urgency of the issue and the harm we have inflicted onto the surroundings as it does not have a direct impact on us yet, except the occasional goosebumps we get from watching videos of plastic pieces retrieved from marine animals. However, with marine animals consuming plastic pieces, we have already introduced plastics into our food chains. Fortunately, microplastics remains in the gut of the seafood we consume. However, microplastics further degrade into even smaller pieces, known as nanoplastics. Nanoplastics are small enough to penetrate cells and move into tissues and organs of seafood. Thus there is a possibility that we might consume the plastics we dispose of ourselves, bringing harm to our health. After all, what goes around, comes around. Hence, it is time we start playing our part in reducing plastic usage before we bring plastics to our dinner tables.

Apart from environmental benefits, the no straw ban reaps economic benefits as well. With the increased awareness of environmental issues, there is a rise of conscious consumption, where consumers buy from companies who are socially responsible. Hence, big companies around the world like Starbucks, Royal Caribbean, and American Airlines have either banned or are working towards banning plastic straws, which leads to the increased need for greener alternatives. As a result, many companies are jumping on the bandwagon and manufacturing alternatives like metal and glass straws, with some even extending it to wider straws for bubble tea use. Hence, I would expect this business to be expanding quicker than ever as more creative and feasible alternatives arise. I am quite positive about the economic benefits that it will bring to businesses and the world economy altogether.

Initially, I was confused over the whole chaos of “ banning of the no straw ban” as I thought that everyone could just be well like me, sipping my drink from the cup. However, I soon found out that as we advance to a greener future, we are doing so at the expense of the convenience of people with disabilities. People with muscular dystrophy have their muscles deteriorate progressively. Over time, it becomes harder for them to pick things up. Hence, they depend on plastic straws in their everyday lives to consume their drinks. With more restaurants, airlines and other service establishments banning plastic straws, people with disabilities will face increased inconvenience and their accessibility to these places will be greatly limited. Seek alternatives, everyone might think. Paper straws dissolve and can be a choking hazard. Metal straws can be too hot or cold, and can be painful for

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those with symptoms like jitters. Glass straws break easily and are not a safe option for people with seizures and poor motor function. Hence, it is evident that finding something as useful as a plastic straw is rather tedious. Its width and length, ability to bend and handle drinks of all temperatures are exactly what people with disabilities need. This solution of “ seeking more environmentally friendly alternatives” is an epitome of “ one size does not fit all” as we are neglecting this essential group of people that make up a substantial 10% of the world population. All in all, is it not ironic that the world is trying to solve a problem by creating multiple more other problems? Well, the ban can come, but after we find a feasible alternative for the disability community who are suffering.

Right now, alternatives to plastic straws are still considered a new concept and given our curious nature, we are more inclined to try it out. However, over time, I am worried that it is hard to commit to using alternatives on the go as we do not have immediate access to a sink outside where we can wash after use. Hence, should the hype die down, will we be back to square one and start using plastic straws all over again?

All that being said, my main concern is that we are not grasping and the cause of the problem, and are just solving issues as they pop up. Should the video that went viral be about saving a sea turtle trapped in a plastic bag, would it have been a plastic bag ban? Then, I would have wished for it to involve fishnets and gears as at least 46 percent of the plastic in the garbage patch by weight comes from fishing nets and gears. The issue here is that we are using and disposing of plastics unsustainably. Although the no straw ban

is a good initiative, it is a short-term solution and many implications arise together with it. We should research on a more technologically advanced way to dispose of waste that we create, or come up with campaigns that urge to change consumers' behavior, and implement it in addition to reducing plastic straws usage. This way, we can be assured to be more forward-looking and the issue of the overuse of plastic can be controlled better.

In my honest opinion, a ban is too extreme. Companies can stop giving out straws freely to the public but have this policy implemented in the sense that it will be given upon request. That way, those who need it still have access to it and those who do not necessarily require them can make do with what they have, either by using their reusable straws or sipping from the cup directly. Also, a charge can be levied with each plastic straw given out, to disincentivize those who do not need the plastic straw from asking for one. I feel this is the best short-term solution for now as we wait for the next noble invention, one that is similar to that of a plastic straw, to be out in the market.

I have to admit, whenever plastic straws are available, I would not hesitate to use them out of convenience. However, I am in the phase of getting used to including my metal straw in my everyday life. I love biting my straw whenever I have my drink, only to be welcomed by the immense pain I get from the hard metal straw. Besides, I am a very forgetful person and the thought of bringing my metal straw along with me whenever I go out always slip my mind. With the ban taking over the world, I hope I can adapt to it as

soon as possible, and also hold onto one plastic straw and keep it for my children and grandchildren who might not have the chance to see what a plastic straw is. Who knows, it might be called in to be a museum exhibit in the year 2118.

In conclusion, it is true that the no straw ban brings about benefits, both environmentally and economically, to the world. However, like many solutions to problems, it is not a foolproof idea and it has many questions and unintended consequences tagged to it. How are we going to help the people with disabilities and whether or not this solution solves the cause of the overuse of plastics all remain unanswered. Regardless, I will look forward to the day where technology is the long-term answer to these questions. Right now, I just hope firms will be more friendly and flexible about plastic straws and not outright ban it so that we all have more time to adapt to this significant change.