

Single-Use Plastic a Growing Environmental Threat

Single-Use plastics have become a pollution and litter problem in the United States and across the globe. Only about 9.5% of postconsumer plastic is collected for recycling so much of the non-recycled plastic ends up in the oceans, rivers, lakes, streams, along roadways or in landfills and incinerators.

The amount of plastic waste in the world's oceans is staggering. According to the Ocean Conservancy approximately 150 metric tons of plastic is already floating in the oceans with an additional 8 million metric tons of plastics expected each year.

Critics of reducing single-use plastic items contend abandoned fishing lines are a major source of ocean debris, and much of the remaining plastic comes from Asia. Although discarded fishing lines are a considerable problem, individuals have little control over this practice. As individuals we can decide to reduce single-use plastics by opting for re-usable bags, water bottles and by drinking beverages without straws.

While it is true, Asian countries do significantly contribute to the plastic debris breaking down into microplastics in the oceans, it should be noted the contributing countries were not prepared, or equipped, to handle massive amounts of plastic from single-use "throw-away" items that their populations have become dependent on over the past several decades.

A number of countries in Asia now recognize single-use plastics as a significant problem and are attempting to curb the flow of these materials. For example, Taiwan has approved banning single-use plastic cups, shopping bags and straws by 2030.

Countries and cities around the world are also taking action to reduce single-use plastic (see the articles and videos WEAL has posted on single-use plastics). Kenya has implemented the toughest ban on plastic bags in the world with fines up to \$38,000 or prison sentences up to four years.

It is difficult to blame Asia for ocean debris in the Caribbean, along the Atlantic coast or in the Great Lakes. In the United States, and most developed countries, litter is picked up by DPW's, Adopt a Highway groups (WEAL is one of them), organized cleanups along our rivers and lakes, as well as local residents who devote time to picking up litter. Just because we may not always see single-use plastic litter doesn't mean it doesn't exist and is not entering local waterways.

How You Can Help

Decide to choose sustainable alternatives and avoid single-use plastic items whenever possible. If you have to purchase a bottle of water when you are away put the cap on and take it home to be recycled. If you are ordering a takeout meal to bring home, ask not to have plastic cutlery included. Always keep a few reusable bags in your car so you can avoid plastic bags and ask not to have a straw whenever you order a beverage.

Photos of plastic litter is a powerful deterrent and documents the problem. WEAL is looking for

photos of single-use plastic debris in Waukesha County and around Lake Michigan to post on the WEAL website and Facebook page. If you see single-use plastic debris, please take photo and contact WEAL at www.weal.org. and provide the location, date, and if you want your name included with the photo or photos.

Resources and Single-Use Plastic Updates

WEAL has posted articles, videos and resources associated with single-use plastics on the WEAL website. This information will be frequently updated.

WEAL will also be adding a section on our website and Facebook page devoted specifically to WEAL's upcoming "**Skip the Straw**" Initiative. Check the WEAL website at www.weal.org or WEAL's Facebook page to stay informed and to get involved!