



Environment Digest 39

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Plastic Pollution

Half of all plastic products are designed to be used just once and thrown away, and most of them have become an integral part of our everyday, convenient lives. Some of the most common single-use plastic items include plastic bottles, food packaging, plastic straws and cutlery, fast fashion clothing, and plastic grocery bags. These plastics are often used in ways that make it difficult for consumers to avoid them – in food wrapping for example.

Plastics are made for durability, so it is ironic that they are so often used for short-term functions. Furthermore, most plastics are produced from fossil fuels such as crude oil and gas (and are known as virgin or primary plastics), which makes plastic a significant contributor to the global fossil fuel record.

<https://tinyurl.com/3d6b374n>

<https://tinyurl.com/2vppn24d>

The world produces about 400 million tonnes of plastic waste every year, and only 9% of this is successfully recycled. Most of it ends up in landfills, and a considerable amount gets washed into the oceans through rivers and lakes, as unregulated waste. <https://tinyurl.com/mwrj6bta>

<https://tinyurl.com/4wpfsj8w>

This is expected to increase by a projected 23-37 million tonnes by 2040, unless we change how we currently produce, use and dispose of plastic. <https://tinyurl.com/mr3k8m8p>

The direct and deadly effect of plastic pollution on wildlife is one of its worst threats. Thousands of sea birds, as well as turtles, seals and other marine mammals die each year from plastic ingestion and entanglement. <https://tinyurl.com/bdwvbjhd>

While the full extent of the impact of plastic pollution on human and animal health is still unknown, there is substantial evidence that micro-plastics and chemicals associated with plastic can enter the human body and can be linked to health concerns. <https://tinyurl.com/3b3bvth8>

<https://tinyurl.com/y8mcsyhh>

Despite many efforts to reduce plastic waste mismanagement, through initiatives such as the ban of single-use plastic grocery bags in some countries, there is still much that needs to change at policy level, especially in the design and production aspects of the plastic value chain. Governments have a much bigger role to play in encouraging the production of plastic alternatives, and in enabling the responsible use and management of plastic waste in circular economies. <https://tinyurl.com/ybmkuxwp>

<https://tinyurl.com/3juenjzr>

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