

PLASTIC PRODUCTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q. What is the link between climate change and the plastic industry?

A. Plastic is made from petrochemicals, a byproduct of the fossil fuel industry. Because it is a byproduct, it is cheap and readily available – and thus very profitable for companies. Industry benefits from increasing the market for plastic as part of our reliance on fossil fuels. From extraction to disposal and even once pollution, the entire lifecycle of plastic releases emissions that contribute to the climate crisis. In 2019, the plastics industry is estimated to release as much greenhouse gases as 189 new coal-fired power plants running year-round. In the next decade, expansion will increase that to about 295 coal plants, or 1.34 gigatons of emissions. By 2050, the amount of emissions is set to reach 56 gigatons or 14% of the world's carbon budget and a whopping 20% of global oil consumption.¹

Q. Many people want to responsibly recycle plastic. Is recycling plastic an effective way for us to address climate change?

A. No. It is a myth that plastics picked up from curbside or dropped off at depots are being recycled fully. Putting a water bottle, yoghurt container or shampoo bottle in the curbside bin does not equal a new bottle or container being created. Only 10% (estimated) plastic in BC is actually being reused for new products. Less than 9% of plastic is recycled in Canada. Some types of recycling such as waste-to-energy produces significant emissions. While using recycled plastic in products can reduce petroleum inputs, recycling at current rates is not meaningfully reducing virgin inputs or related emissions because plastic production continues to rise. The most effective way to help cut emissions and address climate change is to cut plastic production and move to a system not dependent on single-use plastics.

Q. Is industry moving away from using plastics to more climate-friendly options?

A. Unfortunately the trend by industry currently has been to increase plastic production and also reliance by consumers. Half of all plastic produced globally was made in the last 15 years! Production is set to increase by 40% over the next decade. While we've seen some companies use more sustainable alternatives, we have not seen reduction that mirrors that scale of the problem, or the scaling up of reuse and refill models that can help change a system to one less reliant on fossil fuels and disposable products. We as consumers see this trend in any trip to a grocery store, where single-use plastics are used for products that historically never required plastic. Ultimately, it is consumers who pay for the wrapping on purchases and inadvertently are supporting plastic usage. We can shift the responsibility to the producers and distributors of these products by holding them accountable for the plastic problem they've created.

Q. How can I help address climate change in regards to plastic use?

A. You can make a difference by learning more, sharing your knowledge, and taking action:

Refuse: Whenever possible, say no to single-use plastics, such as plastic straws, bags, bottles, and takeaway containers.

Reduce Use: Bring your own reusable utensils, containers, bottles and bags.

Use Your Voice to Influence Business: Tell your local supermarket or restaurant manager, or customer service representative, that you don't want single-use plastic items or packaging and you want reusable options. Where possible, shop at stores that allow you to bring your own reusable containers for purchasing bulk items and choose markets that sell loose produce instead of plastic-wrapped produce.

Learn: Knowledge is power. There is a wealth of information about Zero Waste Living, including ways that we can shift away from single-use plastics. Help educate your family, friends, classmates or colleagues to help build the movement.

Lobby Your Governments: Call for government action: Urge all levels of government to move towards a ban on all non-essential plastics.

Get involved: Join Surfrider Vancouver Island's "Rise Above Plastics" program to get involved in supporting local campaigns to help stop plastic pollution at the source and keep oil in the ground to combat the climate crisis.

Reference Sites:

<https://www.surfrider.org/coastal-blog/entry/the-link-between-fossil-fuels-single-use-plastics-and-climate-change>

<https://wwf.panda.org/?344071/Accountability-can-reverse-plastic-pollution-crisis-says-WWF-report>

<https://wwf.panda.org/?344071/Accountability-can-reverse-plastic-pollution-crisis-says-WWF-report>

http://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/solving_plastic_pollution_through_accountability_eng_singles.pdf



SURFRIDER
FOUNDATION
VANCOUVER ISLAND, BC

<https://vancouverisland.surfrider.org>

