



NATIONAL

# NEW SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BAN

– SIX PLASTICS PRODUCTS TO BE OUTLAWED BY 2021



It poisons majestic sea creatures, or chokes the life out of them. It **compromises** the air we breathe and the food we eat. It fouls once-**pristine** beaches, gets trapped in ice – and it will never, ever entirely go away. What’s the **culprit**? Plastic.

Yet the world keeps making more of this substance – nearly 400 million tonnes a year. And we continue to dispose of it irresponsibly. In fact, scientists say that some 22 million kilograms of plastic enters the oceans daily. That’s about the same as one full garbage truck per minute!

Apart from the damage it does to marine life, the food chain, and our health, plastic also contributes to global warming. Made from petroleum, it releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere when it is burned as waste – and that increases carbon emissions.

## FANTASTIC PLASTIC?

So should we stop using plastic altogether? Most experts **concede** doing so wouldn’t be practical. After all, plastic has many valuable features. It is cheap to make, strong, lightweight, and **malleable**.

Manufacturers rely on it to produce sports equipment, electronics, household goods, building materials, cars, medical implements, farming tools, and thousands of other items.

On the other hand, Canada creates 3.3 million tonnes of plastic waste every year and 29,000 tonnes of it seeps into the environment. Clearly, we must do a better job of managing this pollutant. So where do we start?

## THE LAST STRAW

The obvious place to begin, says the federal government, is to outlaw plastic goods that we use only once and then toss away. These items end up in our landfills and waterways because they’re too difficult or too costly to recycle. That’s a shame, because other non-plastic recyclable products can easily take their place.

So by the end of 2021, Canada will ban six of the worst offenders – checkout bags, straws, stir sticks, six-pack rings, cutlery, and hard-to-recycle food containers. By making this move, our nation is joining the ranks of 35 countries that have promised similar actions, including the United Kingdom, France, and Italy.

“Plastic pollution threatens our natural environment. It fills our rivers or lakes, and most particularly our oceans, choking the wildlife that live there,” Canadian Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson said. “Canadians see the impact that pollution has from coast to coast to coast.”

## DID YOU KNOW?

Due to solar UV radiation, wind, currents, and other natural factors, plastic breaks into microplastics (particles smaller than 5 mm) or nanoplastics (particles smaller than 100 nm).

## A GREAT START . . . ?

Most analysts say that the federal government is taking a step in the right direction. At present, nearly half of our plastic waste – 47 percent – comes from plastic packaging and single-use products, according to the watchdog group Oceana Canada. Canadians are leaving stores with up to 15 billion plastic bags every year. As well, we sip our drinks through 57 million plastic straws every day. By taking these

## DEFINITIONS

**COMPROMISE:** to have a harmful effect on something

**CONCEDE:** to admit that something is true

**CULPRIT:** something that is responsible for a bad situation

**MALLEABLE:** easy to bend or to make into a different shape

**NM:** nanometre; a unit of length equal to one billionth of a metre

**PRISTINE:** in very good condition, as if new



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materials out of circulation, we can make a real difference to the health of our lakes, rivers, and oceans.

## ... OR NOT GOOD ENOUGH?

The NDP and the Green Party support the Liberal government’s single-use plastic ban, but not everyone is backing it.

Author and activist Maude Barlow, for one, said the **prohibition** isn’t going far enough because it doesn’t include plastic bottles. In Ontario alone, according to one report, instead of being recycled, about one billion of these bottles end up in landfills or the environment every year.

“[Not including plastic bottles is] a terrible oversight,” Ms. Barlow said. “It would make a huge difference if they would ban that.”

Meanwhile, Diane Brisebois, president of the Retail Council of Canada, which represents about 45,000 stores, said her group supports the plan’s goal to eliminate single-use products. But she warned that the price of goods will go up if new federal standards aren’t applied equally in every province and territory.

## HUGE SPIKE IN PLASTIC TRASH

For their part, critics in the Conservative Party expressed concerns that the new rules could apply to personal protective equipment (PPE). Hospital personnel and others use PPE to guard against getting sick when exposed to COVID-19 or other **communicable** diseases.

## THE CANADA-WIDE STRATEGY ON ZERO PLASTIC WASTE

Banning single-use products is part of a larger effort called The Canada-Wide Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste. This action plan, which the federal government introduced in 2019, doesn’t propose getting rid of all plastics. Instead, the goal is to diminish the substance’s harmful impacts. How? By preventing more plastic from entering landfills and collecting it for recycling more **rigorously**.

The program commits the federal government, the provinces, and the territories to work with industry to reuse, recycle, or **repurpose** 100 percent of all plastics by 2030. It aims to set consistent standards and targets for companies that produce plastic waste or use it to package their goods. It would also make manufacturers more responsible for managing and assuming the cost of the plastic they discard.

In this way, the government hopes to achieve a circular plastic economy that keeps these materials and products in use as long as possible in order to reduce environmental **degradation**. In fact, one estimate states that these actions will prevent 1.82 **megatonnes** of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent greenhouse gas emissions from entering the atmosphere. The economy will benefit as well. Canada could save \$500 million annually and create 42,000 direct and/or indirect jobs for recyclers and others.

Mr. Wilkinson reassured the Conservatives that PPE would not be included in the list of outlawed products. He added that he’s nonetheless working to see that these items don’t gather in landfills.

“We committed, with the provinces and territories, to working together and with industry to ensure that we can properly dispose of PPE so that it does not end up in our natural environment,” he said. “We are also investigating solutions to recycle PPE where it is safe to do so, and add options to make some of the PPE biodegradable.”

According to Ashley Wallis of Environmental Defence, the use of one-time-only plastic may have increased by up to 300 percent since

COVID-19 set in. She says that the federal government should compel the manufacturers of PPE to invest in collecting and recycling their discarded goods.

## HOPE FOR THE OCEANS

In any event, most experts agree that banning the use of throwaway plastic is a necessity.

“There is still hope for our oceans,” says Kim Elmslie of Oceana Canada. “We can end the plastic disaster for ourselves, for our oceans, and for our future by stopping it at the source. By implementing the promised national ban, our government has an opportunity to show leadership in helping solve this global crisis that we as a country are contributing to.” ★

## DEFINITIONS

**COMMUNICABLE:** able to be passed to another person

**DEGRADATION:** the act or process of damaging or ruining something

**MEGATONNE:** a unit of mass equal to 1,000,000 metric tons. (A metric ton is exactly 1000 kilograms, making a megatonne equal to 1,000,000,000 kilograms.)

**PROHIBITION:** a law or rule forbidding something

**REPURPOSE:** to change (something) so that it can be used for a different purpose

**RIGOROUS:** very strict and demanding