

THE FIELD REPORT

VOLUME I

1

HOTELS



THE P WORD

From straws to shrink wrap, here are some tips to stop using plastic and help save the world.

The Facts

According to the *New York Times*, 6.3 billion metric tons of plastic has been thrown away since 1950 and only nine percent of this amount has been recycled, with another 60% sitting in landfills or littering the landscape. It's estimated that an average North American accumulates more than 300 pounds of plastic trash per year, while a study conducted by the World Economic Forum found that the equivalent of one garbage truck of plastic is dumped into the ocean every minute. This plastic then drifts into large systems of circulating ocean currents known as gyres, creating an enormous vortex of plastic waste in the ocean. Five of these marine "garbage patches" are located across the world, with one the size of Texas sitting between California and Hawaii off the Pacific coast. At our current rate of consumption, scientists predict there will be more plastic in the world's oceans than fish by the year 2050.

Ocean pollution isn't just an aesthetic problem. Once trapped in a gyre, plastic breaks down into tiny particles called microplastics. These invisible fragments enter the bloodstream of marine organisms and can never be processed out. They are then passed onto the fish who eat them and work their way up the food chain until they reach humans. According to a Plymouth University study, one third of fish caught in the UK had plastic inside.

And it's not just plastic in the ocean that poses a threat to human health. Food and beverage packaging sitting on our supermarket shelves contains harmful chemicals like phthalates (DEHP) and bisphenol-A (BPA), which can leach directly into the food and drinks we consume. Studies have shown a correlation between these chemicals and increased risk to a variety of health problems, including reproductive system abnormalities, adult-onset diabetes, cancer, and resistance to chemotherapy.

How You Can Help

In the face of these cataclysmic statistics and the innumerable amount of essential consumer products wrapped in one-use plastic packaging, it's hard to know how one person can make a dent in this proliferating problem. A good place to start is by practicing the "Five Rs" recommended by the Earth Day Network to #EndPlasticPollution, which are: reduce, refuse, reuse, recycle, and remove.

Reduce

Since many plastics can't be recycled efficiently, it's important to be responsible when choosing which products to purchase in the first place. "Plastic isn't technically recycled," writer, speaker and waste-free living advocate Lindsey Miles told *ABC News* in an interview. "It is down-cycled and made into plastic of lesser quality and it maybe goes through two cycles before it ends up being landfill." A sobering fact: Nearly all the plastic ever created still exists in some form today. By cutting down on consumption you're able to actively reduce the amount of plastic that ends up in the environment.

Brooklyn-based environmentalist and entrepreneur Lauren Singer lives a zero-waste lifestyle and can fit three years' worth of her trash into a mason jar. She offers tips to help others live a plastic-free life on her blog, *Trash is for Tossers*, and sells her personal care and household products free from harmful chemicals and wasteful packaging at her online retail store *The Simply Co.* and the Williamsburg-based *Package Free Shop*. Singer's products can also be found at *1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge*, where she periodically gives educational talks to guests about how they can reduce their plastic footprint. "It's important to us that lessons learned at our hotels can be taken home with guests to help make their lives more sustainable," says Hannah Bronfman, director of sustainability and impact at *1 Hotels*.





Refuse

Many of the most frequently discarded plastic items are given out for free like single-use plastic shopping bags, straws, plastic utensils, disposable cups, and the list goes on. One way to reduce your pollution footprint is to refuse these items and carry a sustainable alternative with you like a metal or wood straw and reusable canvas bags. Consumers have a real power to effect change by refusing to purchase products that are excessively wrapped in plastic. Also, try to buy clothing made from organic fibers rather than synthetic materials like polyester and nylon because they shed plastic microfibers in the washing machine. Due to their microscopic size, plastic microfibers pass through water treatment plants undetected and end up in the world's rivers, lakes and oceans by the billions, wreaking havoc on natural ecosystems.

Reuse

Purchasing products that are meant for reuse is an effective way to decrease plastic consumption. Invest in a stainless steel or glass water bottle instead of using plastic. According to the *BBC*, plastic drink bottles, which take around 450 years to biodegrade, are one of the most common forms of plastic waste. A staggering 420 billion plastic bottles were sold in 2016 alone. That's a million bottles sold per minute, and less than 50% of those were recycled. *Sciencing* tells us that if everyone in the U.S. switched to reusable drinking containers for one year, it would save enough crude oil to power a million cars for a year.

Instead of ziplock bags, try using reusable wax-lined bags and make it a point to reuse take-out food containers for kitchen storage. Also, purchasing second-hand clothing or donating old wardrobe items, furniture, toys and electronics extends the lifecycle of products. Support creative entrepreneurs like the founders of Thread, Precious Plastic and Sea2see, who collect plastic waste and turn it into consumer goods like clothing, housewares and designer eyewear.

Recycle

When you can't refuse or reuse plastics, recycling is the best option. It's important to know the rules of your locality because recycling incorrect items slows down the sorting process. Visit the webpage "[I Want To Be Recycled.org](http://IWantToBeRecycled.org)" to research what items can be recycled in your community. According to the *BBC*, only 9% of the world's plastic waste has been recycled (as of 2015). It's important to educate yourself about recycling and make a commitment to doing so.

Remove

To have a direct and immediate impact on plastic pollution, you can help remove plastic waste from the environment by pressing your local government leaders for legislation to ban single-use plastic bags and water bottles, organizing or joining litter clean-ups in your community, and supporting organizations that are already tackling this issue.

The Ocean Cleanup, a non-profit startup that's installing a fleet of passive plastic filtration systems in the ocean this year, is hoping to remove 50% of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the next five years. The company's 19-year old founder and CEO Boyan Slat believes that for society to progress, we should not only move forward, but also clean up after ourselves.