

Pass Legislation to Stop Plastic Pollution

The Alliance for the Great Lakes urges Congress to pass legislation that:



Makes plastic waste producers responsible for its reduction.



Reduces the federal government's use of single-use plastics.



Funds additional research on the public health impact of plastics.

Background: The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study, *"Reckoning with the U.S. Role in Global Ocean Plastic Waste,"* estimates that approximately 8 million metric tons of plastic waste enter the ocean each year, with the U.S. leading the world in plastic waste generation. Furthermore, the NAS notes that plastic waste has negative effects on marine and freshwater life, with reports that approximately 914 marine or freshwater species have been observed either entangled in plastic or with plastic ingested by the species. A recent study confirms that humans are not immune from the scourge of plastic waste pollution, as microplastics have recently been found in the human lungs and blood. It is estimated that humans ingest a credit card-sized amount of plastic each week, with unknown long-term consequences for our health. Plastics are manufactured from fossil fuels and chemicals, and harmful chemicals are released at every stage of the plastic life cycle, including during production, transportation, use, and disposal. Some of these chemicals are known to cause cancer, damage immune and reproductive systems, and cause developmental delays.

The prevalence of plastic pollution in the environment is the direct result of increasing global plastic production worldwide. Approximately 300 million metric tons of plastic are produced each year, and EPA estimates that about 90 percent is either landfilled or burned. Here in the Great Lakes, the Alliance removes about 18 tons of trash annually

from beaches and shorelines, and 85% of that trash is plastic. Researchers at the Rochester Institute of Technology estimate that 22 million pounds of plastics enter the Great Lakes every year, with half of that going into Lake Michigan alone. This plastic waste eventually breaks down into microplastics. Ongoing research estimates that the concentrations of microplastics in the Great Lakes surpass those in the oceans. This is of serious concern given that the Great Lakes are a source of drinking water for 40 million Americans.

Policies regarding single-use plastics, plastic pollution, and plastic production vary greatly among the Great Lakes states. Several Great Lakes states have active preemption laws (or "bans on bans") that prevent any state or local regulation of plastic. These states include Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio. For many years, efforts to stop plastic pollution, such as recycling, put the responsibility on the end-user. But only a fraction of plastic produced each year is recycled, leaving the remainder to end up in landfills or as litter that lands in our waterways. The alternative is to require plastic producers to be responsible for their products through their lifecycle, called extended producer responsibility. Congress has an opportunity to be a leader on this issue. Federal legislation and oversight are needed, given the disparity in how states treat this issue and the growing public health concerns.