

# Producing plastic products generates an enormous amount of greenhouse gas emissions

Florida's cities and counties are trying to curb the use of plastic because state officials are ignoring the problem

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**By Catherine Uden, Oceana**

An estimated **17.6 billion pounds of plastic** leak into the marine environment from land-based sources every year.

This is roughly equivalent to dumping a garbage truck full of plastic into the oceans every minute. Once in the ocean, plastic breaks up into smaller and smaller pieces that are eaten by marine animals of all sizes, from tiny zooplankton to fish, sea turtles, and whales. We're now eating, drinking, and even breathing plastic.

Only **9% of the plastic waste** ever produced has been recycled, and only about 2% of plastic is effectively recycled into something of equal or higher value. It's been clear for decades now that we can't recycle our way out of this problem. The only solution is to stop plastic pollution at the source.



As of 2015, companies worldwide were producing **400 million tons** of plastic annually, and that is expected to quadruple by 2050. This massive increase in plastic production is being fueled by new access to large amounts of natural gas from fracking, which is feeding a similar increase in the use of single-use plastics.

Petrochemical plants have caused one region of Louisiana to be dubbed "**Cancer Alley**," and residents are fighting a new plastic production facility that could release **13 million tons** of greenhouse gases a year, the equivalent of three coal-fired power plants, and would emit 800 tons of toxic pollutants into the air each year.

Many people are not aware of how single-use plastic affects climate change. The Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) issued a **report** identifying plastic as a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, producing nearly **twice as much** as the aviation sector.

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CIEL’s report found that in 2019, the production and incineration of plastic added more than 850 million metric tons of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere — equal to the emissions from 189 500-megawatt coal-fired power plants. At present rates, these greenhouse gas emissions from the plastic lifecycle threaten the ability of the global community to meet carbon emissions targets.

Many cities, states, counties, and even entire nations have passed plastic reduction policies. Now, as people are learning that plastic is a climate issue, some cities are placing plastic-waste reduction goals in their climate action plans.

The Florida Legislature has increasingly taken away our power to reduce single-use plastics in our communities. This year, even with these state preemptions, cities and counties have acted to reduce single-use plastics and foam.

Many more should follow their lead. Most recently, Dania Beach passed an ordinance to reduce single-use expanded polystyrene foam food containers and cups on city property, in city contracts and at city events. Orange County banned single-use plastics, including plastic straws and foam food containers. Other cities are drafting similar ordinances.

Until our state and federal lawmakers acknowledge the plastic pollution crisis and agree to act on it, we must do what we can locally to stop the use of single-use plastics.

Catherine Uden is the South Florida Campaign Organizer for *Oceana*

“The Invading Sea” is the opinion arm of the Florida Climate Reporting Network, a collaborative of news organizations across the state focusing on the threats posed by the warming climate.

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