

Plastic Bags: A Massive Environmental Threat

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The Problem

In the past decade, plastic has become the fastest growing waste material in the U.S. In the U.S. alone, people use an estimated 100 billion plastic bags every year (Li & Zhao, 2017). This is in part due to the overwhelming use of single-use plastic bags in the U.S. consumer sector.

The expanding use of single-use plastic bags is greatly contributing to the increase of plastic waste in the U.S. which in turn is leading to more devastating effects on a global scale. Without any action, big or small, the U.S. will continue to mass produce single-use plastic bags at the cost of the environment.

Landfills across the U.S. are made up of only 18.9% of plastic, and only 3.4% of recycled material in the U.S. was plastic in the last year (EPA, 2018), meaning the remaining plastic is being released into the environment.

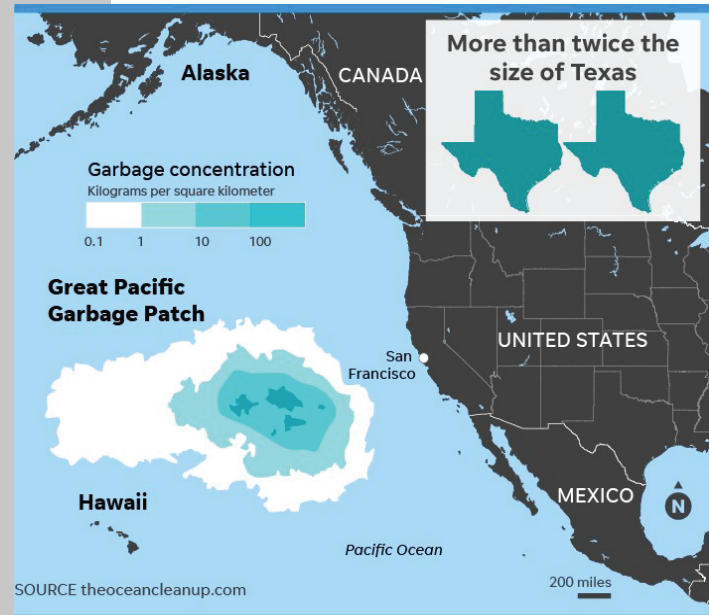


Figure 1; Source: USA Today

A Global Issue

Since 1991, countries across the globe have been enacting policies to reduce plastic bag waste. Plastic waste is plaguing shared oceans; research estimates that plastic debris accounts for 60-80% of marine litter and even reaches 90-95% in some areas (Xanthos & Walker, 2017). Countries have taken different approaches in solving this issue.

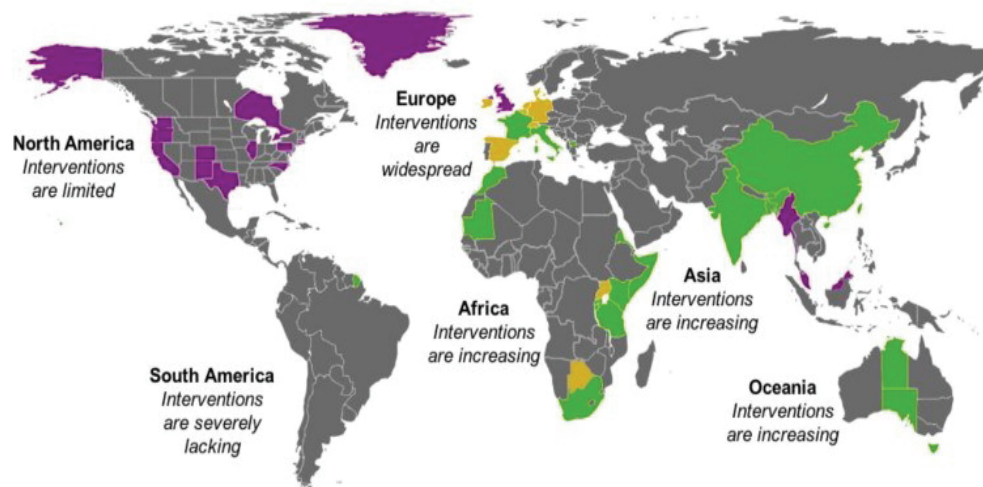


Figure 2; Source: Xanthos & Walker

Hazardous Impacts

3 Key Effects to Note:

1. The breakdown of plastic bags is toxic and harmful to humans due to the bags' absorption of pollutants (Li & Zhao, 2017).
2. Oceanic life is devastated as seen in the Pacific Garbage Patch, a oceanic location where there is about six times more plastic than naturally occurring organic matter (Coulter, 2010).
3. Plastics release chemical additives and pollutants into marine organisms' tissue, which ultimately make their way up into the food chain and eventually the human diet (Coulter, 2010).

Contact your local representatives and in the meantime consider using reusable bags!

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