

It's Time For Change

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Over the past 50 years, the human population has grown more rapidly than it has ever before. With our skyrocketing increase of population, comes the inevitable changes to our environment, and overall, our planet. Plastic pollution is one of those changes. Plastic has become integral to our everyday lives, it is in everything that we use. You can find it in the toothbrush you use, or the keyboard keys you press. You can find it in the coffee cups that you are given and often in the office supplies everyone uses. At this point, it's impossible to avoid plastic in grocery stores, where plastic bottles are often handed out. But how did plastic become such an everyday material?

Convenience, is most likely the answer. For example, high density polyethylene, was invented in 1953, by Karl Ziegler and Erhard Holzkamp. This new film like material was durable and flexible. It was cheap for companies to use, allowing many to get larger profits, and helped drive the economy of many countries. In 1977, grocery stores began to use plastic bags over their usual paper bags, which lead to a fast increase in the use of this material world wide.

In 1989, a technological innovation lead to the development of polyethylene terephthalate plastic, which is the primary plastic used in plastic water bottles. When Coke Cola introduced Dasani and Pepsi introduced Aquafina, the use of plastic bottles rapidly increased. Restaurants and markets all around the world began to provide for these big name brands, and many families began to use individual single serving plastic water bottles, instead of the large jugs or coolers. The convenience of this product allowed for this

We know why companies use this. It's cheap and easy for companies to use and economies are flourishing because of it, so why is it causing so many environmental problems? What's so bad about it? In the end, it's the chemicals used. Many landfills are filled with plastic that wasn't disposed of properly. Plastic bottles and plastic bags take can take up to several decades to biodegrade, 450 years for bottles and 10-1000 years for the bags. While biodegrading, harmful chemicals used in the production of these products are released into the surrounding soil, tarnishing underground water sources and other ecosystems. Some plastic products don't even stay in these landfills. 90% of the waste floating in the ocean are plastic, where they are ingested by wildlife. The chemicals and toxins are absorbed into the bodies of the animals and then passed through food chains, which lead to damage to food sources for other animals, and soon, humans too.

But how can we fix this problem? We are currently only recovering 5% of the plastic we reproduce. For many of us, this issue is larger than most, and it seems to only be getting worse

over time, no matter what we do. However, we can continue to take the little steps toward a better future, even if it seems like it is causing little to no effect, because at the end of the day, the smallest differences can change the world.

Change is a progressive thing. One small decision can cause a ripple effect of positive results. Bringing up different solutions within your schools and clubs, communities and even workplaces, is an easy way to start. Some ideas could include plastic/waste free lunches, community clean ups or waste sorting events. Having fundraisers where proceeds go to organizations that advocate for solutions on a greater scale, is also a good idea to be apart of the change in the world.

Ensuring the you, your family, friends and peers properly dispose of plastic no matter where they are is a simple yet effective way to start. Most of us throw plastic away seemingly with little to no thought, because it is a habit that we've developed over time. Some communities lack the specific sorting containers, especially out in public. Getting together with your community centres and school clubs is an effective way to evoke this change.

Another way to easily help your local environment and ecosystem is to purchase reusable materials that will last a long time. Not only do you save on money in the long run, but in supporting these organizations that pay attention to the effects of plastic pollution, you are helping them combat the issue.

At the end of the day, the use of plastic will always be there. We, as human, created such a material that is cheap and convenient to use and make, while also improving many countries and their economies. But as we have changed the world with our forever developing technologies, we must also ensure that we change with it. We must learn how to fix the damage we've created. Being aware of global issues, such as plastic pollution, and educating one's self on how we can help improve the issue within our own communities is vital. We must remember that even if it seems like it, it's never too late to change the way we live, and for the better.

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