



# The plastic question is hard to crack

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## **The plastic question is hard to crack-Is a total ban the solution?** **Making a choice appears difficult as alternatives are not as green as previously thought**

- A high tide of journalism, activism, and corporate public relations has made plastic a priority for people around the globe.
- But heightened awareness has also bred confusion over people's responsibilities and options, and the role of governments and industry in reducing plastic pollution.
- It's conventional wisdom that the world has a plastic problem.
- Plastic is clearly an environmental crisis, with an estimated eight million animal-killing tonnes entering the oceans each year.
- Less prominent in the plastic narrative are emerging questions over microscopic plastic pollution in food, air, soil, and water, and the safety of chemical additives in plastic food packaging — areas where scientists are racing to learn the implications for human health.
- Proposals to make consumer brands and plastic producers responsible for the cost of plastic waste are slowly taking shape.
- "Plastic is not a problem, but littering is a problem," says B. Swaminathan, a veteran of the plastics industry in Asia and Africa.
- Jurisdictions around the world, including the European Union, are moving to restrict disposable items such as plates and straws.
- At least 33 countries ban plastic bags, but enforcement is spotty.

### **Perfect solutions elusive**

- Taking compostable plastic bags. Others see bioplastics, made from plants, as an answer, but most bioplastics are molecularly similar to plastic made from petroleum, with the same environmental hazards, experts say.
- Meanwhile, momentum is growing to force manufacturers to change product and package design to make reuse and recycling easier.
- Many experts now say plastic producers or consumer brands should pay

for the disposal of their packaging, instead of pushing the cost onto communities.

- Under proposed “Extended Producer Responsibility” rules that are gaining traction in Europe and elsewhere, “if you’ve got a terrible material that is never going to be recycled, you pay a higher fee” for disposal.

### **The human factor**

- Overlooked, for now, are issues that can’t be mitigated by recycling or resolved with a canvas shopping bag.
- Even in a future where improved product design and new regulations reduce plastic waste, questions over the safety of chemicals in food packaging will still have to be addressed.
- Researchers have found dozens of hazardous chemicals that are approved for use in plastic.

### **Conclusion**

- Real changes will only come through government action. Government with effective laws like solid wastemanagement rules, plastic rules, large scale awareness programme and strict enforcement is need of hour.

