

Drowning in Plastic but Still Breathing Hope

Imagine a world where oceans are clean, marine animals are safe, and our cities are free from plastic waste. This image may be far from reality, but it can happen if we all work together to solve one of today's biggest environmental problems: plastic pollution. It is caused by the excessive use and improper disposal of plastic products, especially single-use plastics. These plastics block waterways, harm animals, and even affect the climate. According to the United Nations, around 11 million metric tons of plastic enter the oceans each year, and this number could triple by 2040 if no action is taken. The damage is global and growing, but the solution is multi-faceted, requiring the combined efforts of governments, businesses, scientists, and individuals.

Effective legislation is the backbone of large-scale environmental change. Governments have the power to make rules that protect the environment. This includes banning or limiting the use of single-use plastics such as straws, plastic bags, and utensils. These items are used only once but can stay in the environment for hundreds of years. Strict rules on how plastic is made, used, and disposed of must be enforced. Additionally, the government must invest in recycling infrastructure and make recycling more accessible and efficient. For instance, Rwanda became a role model by banning plastic bags and strictly controlling plastic use, which led to cleaner streets and a healthier environment.

Investing in sustainable plastic alternatives is essential for long-term change. The future depends on new inventions, like biodegradable or compostable materials. Environmentally friendly products made from cassava, mushroom, and seaweed are emerging as viable substitutes. Supporting eco-friendly startups and funding green research are vital to replacing traditional plastics with sustainable options. Promoting reusable items like metal straws, cloth bags, and refillable bottles not only cuts waste but also shifts consumer culture. These innovations show that it is possible to live in a more eco-friendly way while still meeting modern needs.

Major corporations are also responsible, since they produce and use a large amount of plastics. Because they have the money and resources, they can lead the way in making changes. Requiring transparency in plastic use and enforcing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws can hold companies accountable for the waste their products generate. EPR means the company must help in recycling, collecting, and safely disposing of their products. Companies can also shift to a circular economy, where materials are reused instead of being thrown away. A good example is Coca-Cola's *World Without Waste* campaign, which commits to collecting and recycling one bottle or can for every one sold by 2030.

Each person can play a role in reducing plastic waste through daily habits and community efforts. Communities can hold clean-up events, workshops, and campaigns to raise awareness and encourage teamwork. Supporting local, eco-friendly shops and adopting a zero-waste lifestyle popularized by influencers also contributes to the cause. When individuals act, it can create a ripple effect that influences businesses and governments to make bigger changes. Tackling plastic pollution requires collective efforts from governments, businesses, innovators, and individuals. Everyone has something to contribute, and only by joining forces can we truly make a difference. If each sector does its part, a cleaner, healthier planet is not just possible, it is within reach. The future of our Earth depends on the actions we take today. Let us choose to protect our planet by putting sustainability before convenience.

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08/15/2025