

The Biggest Contributors of Plastic Waste

Single use plastics are the highest contributors to plastic waste all over the world—contributing close to 50% of all plastic produced each year. The United States is one of the worst perpetrators, often producing so much waste that they must illegally ship plastic waste to other countries to dispose of. In a 2020 study, it was reported that in the U.S., around 231 pounds of plastic waste are produced by each person every year.

How They Affect the Community

Northwest Arkansas's browning population means that is also an influx in the amount of plastic waste.

- “During a recent stream cleanup of Town Branch Creek in Fayetteville (which is the drinking water supply for Northwest Arkansas), we found. that plastic and polystyrene/ styrofoam were the most common litter in the creek, comprising up to 26% of total litter.”
- Plastic is being thrown into landfills that could be recycled instead or reused
- In an article from KNWA News, it says, “Fayetteville has thrown 46,000 tons of waste into the Tonitown Landfill”
- Plastic from local fast-food restaurants are produced in massive amounts and often take many years to decompose

The Future and Solutions

- Reducing emissions during production of plastic by using windmills or solar energy would decrease emissions by 50%
- Reusing single use plastics before they become unusable. Grocery bags, which account for 31% of plastic waste, are an example of plastic that one can find other uses for
- Recycling single use plastic by separating it from everyday trash
- Switching out single use plastics for more permanent items is the biggest step individuals can make—try bringing a reusable straw instead of getting a new one everywhere you go

The Team



Caitlyn Munden
Pre-Pharmacy



Mason Munden
Bio-Chem



Matthew Rogers
Pre-Pharmacy

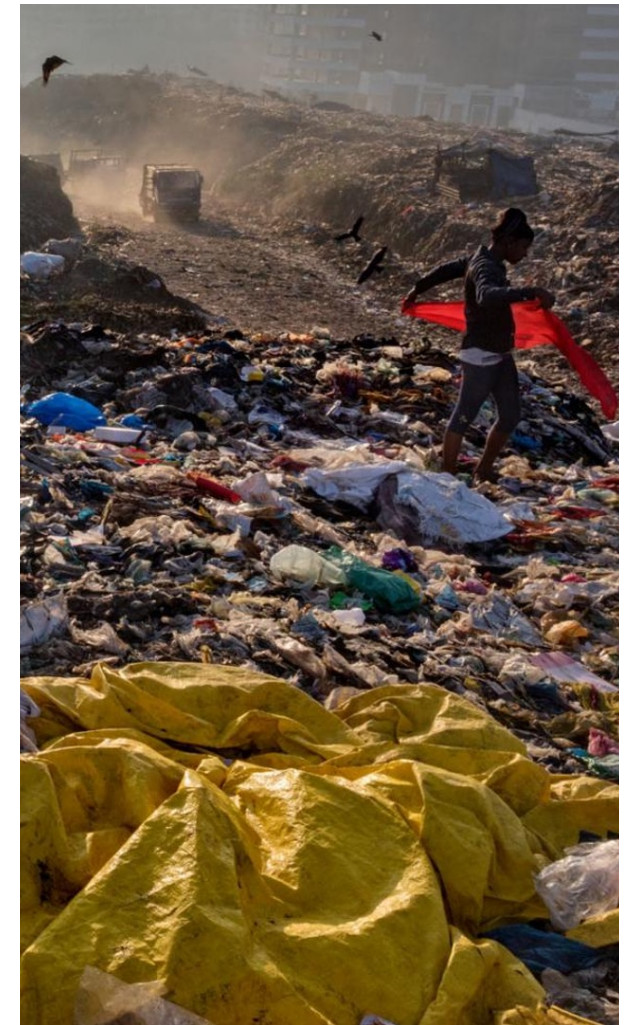


Zachary Suvannalath
Industrial Engineering

Plastic Pollution and the Effects on Earth

Caitlyn Munden, Mason Munden, Matthew Rogers, and Zachary Suvannalath

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“A whopping 91% of plastic isn’t recycled.”

— Laura Parker, NatGeo



On Land

When plastics are broken down in landfills, they release gases that are contributing to global warming. There are now over 27 millions tons of plastics in landfills.

Plastic that is deposited in landfills is often light enough to blow out of landfills and end up in other areas, contributing to waste in different communities.



Factories and Open Burning

Factories that create plastics emit thousands of pounds of gases and chemicals in the air each year, several of which are known to cause many harmful side effects to people such as asthma, lung cancer, and high blood pressure.

Open burning is also a huge contributor to pollution. In Sebastian Country, Arkansas, the Solid Waste District works hard to maintain a ban on the open burning of waste that consists of plastic, rubber, and construction waste. Inhalation of these smoke particles are known to cause bronchitis, emphysema, asthma, and lung cancer.

In Oceans

Around 8 million tons of plastic are thrown in the ocean annually, destroying not only marine environments but the organisms that live there.



The Lifecycle of Single-Use Plastics

- Plastic Bags—20 years
- Coffee Cup—30 years
- Plastic Straw—200 years
- 6-Pack Plastic Rings—400 years
- Plastic Water Bottle—450 years
- Coffee Pod—500 years
- Plastic Cup—450 years
- Disposable Diaper—500 years
- Plastic Toothbrush—500 years

In Lakes

Plastic from visitors accounts for the largest source of waste by volume during clean-up efforts by local groups.