



# Single-Use Plastic

## Why in News

Recently, a report was published which gave details of who makes [single-use plastic](#), **130 million tons a year** at last count, and **who makes money from it**.

- The report was published by **Minderoo, a nonprofit organization** based in Australia along with **academics at the University of Oxford and the Stockholm Environment Institute**.

## Key Points

### ▪ Major Producers:

- Half of the world's single-use plastic is made by **20 big companies**.
  - **Two US companies** followed by a **Chinese-owned petrochemicals** giant, and another one based in Bangkok.

### ▪ Major Investors:

- Production is financed by **financial services companies including banks**.
- Governments are also big stakeholders in this industry. About **40% of the largest single-use plastic makers are partly owned by governments**, including **China and Saudi Arabia**.

### ▪ Growth:

- Single-use plastic has been a very good business, and that's projected to continue. In the **next five years alone, production capacity is forecast to grow by 30%**.

### ▪ Usage:

- There's a huge disparity between richer and poorer nations:
  - An average **American uses and throws away 50 kilograms** of single-use plastic every year whereas an average **Indian uses less than one-twelfth of an American**.

### ▪ Concerns:

#### ◦ Less Recycling:

- Only about **8% of plastic gets recycled in the US**. It is far **cheaper to make things out of newly produced plastic than from recycled plastic**.

#### ◦ Limited Efforts:

- State and municipal governments have had success in banning certain items like plastic grocery bags, foam cups and drinking straws. But the **efforts focused on curtailing the production of single-use plastic have been limited so far**.
- Advocacy efforts to persuade consumers to use less plastic **have failed to gain traction**.

## ▪ Global Initiatives:

- [European Union](#) issued a directive calling for consumer brands to use at least 30% recycled content in plastic bottles by 2025.

## ▪ Indian Initiatives:

- In 2019, the Union government in a bid to **free India of single-use plastics by 2022**, had [laid out a multi-ministerial plan](#) to discourage the use of single-use plastics across the country.
- [Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016](#) which **extended the responsibility to collect waste generated from the products** to their producers and brand owners.

## Single-Use Plastics

### ▪ About:

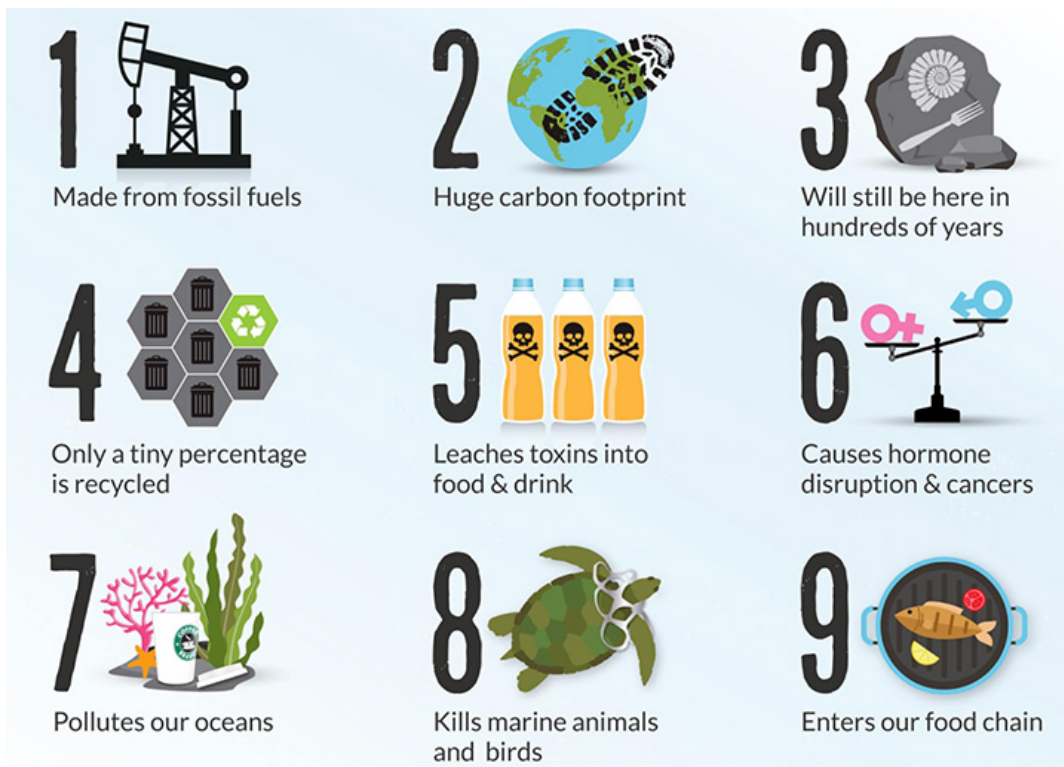
- Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are **used only once before they are thrown away or recycled.**
  - These items are things like **plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.**
- Plastic is so **cheap and convenient** that it has replaced all other materials from the packaging industry but it **takes hundreds of years to disintegrate.**
  - It is a huge problem. If we look at the data, out of **9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste generated every year** in our country, **43% is single use plastic.**

### ▪ Uses:

- The single-use plastic products also **prevent the spread of infection.**
  - Instruments such as **syringes, applicators, drug tests, bandages and wraps are often made to be disposable.**
- Also, single-use plastic products have been **enlisted in the fight against food waste**, keeping food and water fresher for longer and **reducing the potential for contamination.**

### ▪ Problems:

- **Petroleum-based plastic is not biodegradable** and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
- In the process of breaking down, **it releases toxic chemicals** (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic) which **make their way into our food and water supply.**



## Way Forward

- Economically **affordable and ecologically viable alternatives** which will not burden the resources are needed and their prices will also come down with time and increase in demand.
  - Need to **promote alternatives** like cotton, khadi bags and biodegradable plastics.
  - More R&D (Research & Development) and finances for it, are needed to **look for sustainably viable options.**
- Citizens have to bring **behavioural change** and contribute by not littering and helping in waste segregation and waste management.

[Source:IE](#)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/single-use-plastic-4>