

MYTH VS. FACT

SUSTAINABILITY

Plastic is often a more sustainable option than alternative materials for packaging and other uses. While some misconceptions about the sustainability benefits of plastics persist, a review of the facts shows that plastics require less energy to manufacture, generate less waste during production and are easier to recycle than many alternatives.

MYTH

“The environmental impact of plastic is greater than alternative materials.”



FACT

Plastic manufacturing, use and recycling requires less energy and generates less waste than the most common alternatives.

- Plastic products are lighter and require less fuel to transport, translating to lower energy use and carbon emissions.
- If plastic packaging were replaced with other materials, waste and energy consumption would increase.¹
- A study² found plastic baby food packaging provides environmental benefit over glass jars with impacts reduced by 14% to 27% for primary energy and 28% to 31% for global warming.

MYTH

“Banning plastic is the most effective way to solve the issue of plastic waste.”



FACT

Partnerships that bring together industry, regulators and NGOs are a proven way to create lasting change.

- The plastic waste problem is a symptom of poor disposal and waste management not unique to plastic—all forms of packaging when improperly disposed contribute to waste in the environment.
- Banning plastic ignores the many benefits of plastics and steps the plastics industry is taking to increase plastic recycling and reuse.
- Partnerships and consumer education are the most effective tools to achieve the goals that both the industry and critics are aiming for.

MYTH

“Banning plastic straws will address a major source of waste in the environment.”



FACT

Plastic straws account for a small fraction of waste and, when disposed of properly, pose no risk.

- Banning plastic straws does little to solve the problem of plastic waste and does further harm to the environment since alternatives like paper require more resources³ to produce and are less durable.
- When properly disposed, plastic straws pose no more risk than other plastic items or other common household waste
- Time and experience have shown that regulation focused just on straws, or any one specific product, fails to address the core issue of access to waste management and consumer education.

MYTH

“The plastics industry has offered no meaningful solutions to address plastic waste.”



FACT

The plastics industry has funneled billions into research and development to reduce and eliminate plastic waste.

- The plastics industry is the tip of the spear in innovation⁴ and advocacy aimed at reducing the environmental impact of plastics.
- The RECOVER Act⁵ is an industry-supported bill that would allocate federal grants to states and municipalities to invest in improving recycling programs and infrastructure.

MYTH

“Plastic recycling is not sustainable.”



FACT

Plastic's intrinsic recyclability allows for sustainable use and energy recovery options.

- While plastic is 100 percent recyclable, current investment in recycling technology and waste management has not kept pace with the increased use of plastics.
- While investment in recycling ramps up to meet demand, energy recovery is possible when plastic and other discarded waste is incinerated to generate energy in a waste-to-energy process.⁶
- Carbon capture technology can also be utilized to reduce emissions and overall environment impact of waste-to-energy plants.

1 https://www.bpf.co.uk/sustainability/plastics_and_sustainability.aspx

2 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11367-008-0052-6>

3 [https://www.bbc.com/news/business-47027792#:~:text=Unlike%20plastic%20bags%20\(which%20the,making%20single%2Duse%20plastic%20bags.](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-47027792#:~:text=Unlike%20plastic%20bags%20(which%20the,making%20single%2Duse%20plastic%20bags.)

4 <https://www.americanchemistry.com/Media/PressReleasesTranscripts/ACC-news-releases/Plastic-Makers-Committed-to-Ending-Plastic-Waste-in-the-Environment.html>

5 <https://www.recyclingtoday.com/article/recover-act-goes-before-house-committee/>

6 <https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/biomass/waste-to-energy-in-depth.php#:~:text=Waste%2Dto%2Denergy%20plants%20burn,is%20used%20to%20generate%20electricity.&text=Waste%2Dto%2Denergy%20plants%20reduce,of%20waste%20by%20about%2087%25.>