

# HOW PLASTIC IS TRASHING THE PLANET

Plastic was invented to make our lives better. But our dependence on it has created an environmental crisis. Can we reduce our use before it's too late?

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**B**eep! Beep! Beep! The alarm on your cell phone shakes you from sleep. You stumble to the shower, dress, brush your teeth, and run a comb through your hair. There's just enough time to grab a cereal bar and a bottle of orange juice before the school bus rolls down your block. Throwing your binder, folders, and a bag of chips into your backpack, you race out the door.

You've been awake for barely an hour, but you've already used or touched plastic dozens of times. The material is a big part of our lives. It's in everything from electronics and food packaging to medical devices and airplanes. Most plastic is human-made, produced using oil and other **fossil fuels**.

What makes plastic so popular? Unlike natural materials such as wood and

glass, plastic is lightweight. It's also cheap and durable.

But the very qualities that make plastic so useful to us also make it incredibly dangerous to the environment. Plastic doesn't just go away. Instead, it

breaks down into very small pieces over time. And those pieces will stick around for hundreds or perhaps even thousands of years.

For decades, people have sipped from plastic straws and toted groceries in plastic bags without a second thought. And all that plastic—much of it used only once—has added up.

Worldwide, we've produced a staggering 9.2 *billion* tons of plastic since the 1950s. (Think of it this way: One of the heaviest statues in the United States, the Statue of Liberty, weighs 225 tons.)

Where does all our discarded plastic go? →



In a 1955 photo from *Life* magazine, a family celebrates the convenience of single-use plastics.