

ENVIRONMENT

Break Free from Plastic Pollution



by **John Szalasny** August 18, 2020, 2:31 pm 0 Comments



Last month, I was on a Zoom meeting with Rep. Alan Lowenthal regarding H.R. 5845/S.3263, the Break

Free From Plastic Pollution Act, which is the most comprehensive bill to date designed to tackle the

FREE FROM PLASTIC POLLUTION ACT, which is the most comprehensive bill to date designed to tackle the explosion of single-use plastics.

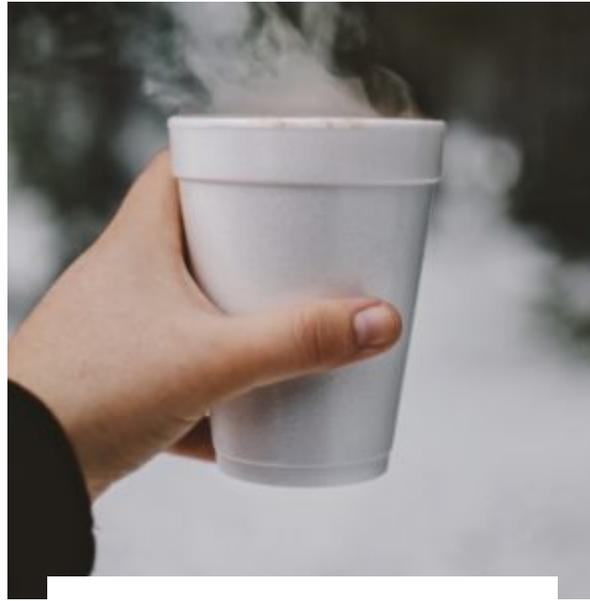


Photo by [Caleb Lucas](#)

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a key component of this bill. It makes producers of packaging and single use plastics fiscally responsible for collecting, managing and recycling or composting the product after consumer use (EPR is used in New York State for tire and car battery recycling). It establishes minimum percentages of these packages that must be reused, recycled or composted and sets standards for recycled content in beverage containers.

In addition, the law would mandate a national bottle deposit system. It would ban Styrofoam containers and plastic utensils and place a user tax on carryout bags. It would also ban the export of plastic waste to other countries.

We cannot afford to ignore the plastic pollution crisis. It is no longer hidden from public view after China's National Sword policy banned the imports of the world's recyclable waste. Since 2017, municipal recycling programs have gone from a small profit maker to a huge cost burden to the taxpayer. Manufacturers are happy to pass on the costs of its packaging waste to the public. It allows them to hide the true cost of their product.

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Recent reports have noted that half of all plastic ever produced was created in the last 12 years. This trend is expected to accelerate as petrochemical companies in the United States look to use their large surplus of fracked natural gas in the production of more and more virgin plastic. This is alarming news when you consider that a 2017 study estimated that mankind has produced over 9 billion tons of plastic and 80 percent of that total ends up in a landfill. Remember, plastic made from fossil fuels does not biodegrade, meaning that the plastic that goes to the landfill will still be plastic 500 years from now.

There have been several excellent documentaries in the past year on plastic pollution that are available for viewing. PBS Newshour's [The Plastic Problem](#), PBS Frontline's [Plastic Wars](#), and The Story of Plastic (which is available on demand through the Discovery Channel). Each will give you a global perspective on the man-made crisis of plastic pollution.

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New York has taken positive steps in combatting plastic pollution with its plastic bag ban (now in effect) and its ban on Styrofoam containers (which goes into effect in 2022). But the issues go beyond the borders of the Empire State and that is why legislation like the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act is important, not only for the management of waste and pollution that it would bring, but also to reduce the need for fossil fuels, the key component in today's plastic production. Plastics are the “Silent Spring” issue of the 21st century – an environmental, public health, and climate change issue all rolled into one.

Lead image: Photo by [Jasmin Sessler](#)

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Written by **John Szalasny**



John Szalasny is someone who cares about our planet. Born too late to join in on the first wave of organized environmental action in the 60's, I'm making up for lost time as I get nearer to retirement on various environmental concerns including the plastic waste crisis. Check out my Facebook group Bring NYC's Styrofoam Ban to My Hometown! <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2098476837129562/>.



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