



Single-Use Plastic

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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**.

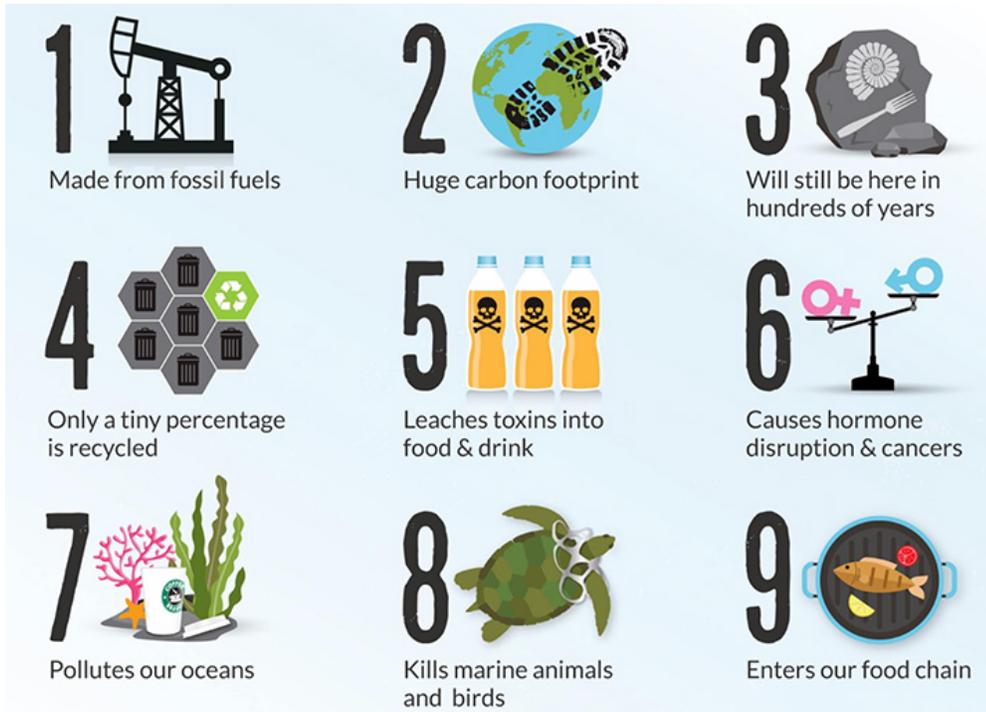
- **Concerns:**
 - **Less Recycling:**
Only about **8% of plastic gets recycled in the US**. It is far **cheaper to make things out of newly produced plastic than from recycled plastic**.
 - **Limited Efforts:**
 - State and municipal governments have had success in banning certain items like plastic 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