

The Protecting Communities From Plastics Act

We are in the midst of a plastic pollution crisis that is fueling climate change and worsening environmental injustice. Plastic production and consumption are on track to double in the next decade without new policies to change this trajectory.

Petrochemicals are at the root of both the climate crisis and the plastic pollution epidemic. As the world transitions to clean and renewable energy, demand for oil and natural gas is projected to shift to petrochemicals. The International Energy Agency forecasts that plastics and other petrochemicals will become the largest driver of oil demand by 2050 and according to industry estimates, will exceed carbon emissions of coal-fired power by 2030. As plastic production continues to grow, so will associated greenhouse gas emissions, threatening to put our climate goals further out of reach. Petrochemical, plastic production, and waste incineration facilities—which are disproportionately located in communities of color and low-wealth communities—release harmful air and water pollution with major human health consequences for surrounding communities, including increased incidences of asthma, cancers, endocrine disruption, developmental disorders, and heart disease. Transitioning other sectors of our economy off of fossil fuels only to replace that demand with more fossil-based plastic production is not a sustainable solution, and will continue to perpetuate existing climate and environmental justice harms.

The Protecting Communities from Plastics Act helps tackle the plastic pollution crisis head on, cracking down on the plastic production process, addressing the harmful environmental justice impacts of this growing fossil fuel sector, and moving our economy away from an overreliance on single-use plastic. It establishes stricter rules for petrochemical plants to safeguard the health of American communities and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions fueling the climate crisis.

- **Communities located near plastics facilities deserve strong protections.** This bill builds off the Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act’s strong environmental justice protections, establishing a temporary pause on permitting new and expanded plastic facilities while the EPA creates and, as necessary, updates regulations for plastics facilities to protect fence-line communities from the direct and cumulative impacts of plastic production and disposal. It expands the definition of covered facilities, requires cumulative impacts to be considered in future permitting decisions for these facilities, and strengthens Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Toxic Substances Control Act protections to safeguard communities and reduce climate and pollution impacts. The bill also prohibits siting new facilities within five miles of a school, residence, or community building, and directs EPA to develop, and require as a condition of the facility’s permit, new financial assurance requirements to ensure that communities aren’t left with the bill or the contamination when a plastics facility decides to close.
- **We can’t just recycle our way out of the plastic crisis.** The United States only recycles 5% of our plastic, according to most recent estimates. We need to reduce our reliance on single-use plastic packaging and food service wares in the first place – many of which are discarded after just minutes of use. This bill takes a forward-looking approach to begin shifting the U.S. economy away from an unnecessary dependence on certain single-use plastics, creating new nationwide targets for plastic source reduction and reuse in the packaging and food service sectors. These are paired with federal incentives to spur expansion of reusable and refillable systems, with a particular focus on ensuring that the environmental justice communities who are disproportionately impacted by the plastic pollution crisis will realize benefits from these initiatives. The bill also takes important steps forward in addressing the overuse of single-use plastic in the agricultural sector.
- **Scientists have found plastic inside essentially all living things.** Lastly, this bill will expand our understanding of the health effects of microplastics by directing the NIH to support research on the presence and impacts of microplastics in the human body, and directing the FDA to study the presence of microplastics in water and food products. It also tasks the EPA with establishing a pilot program to test the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of technologies to prevent microplastics from entering the environment.