



**Friends of
the Earth
Cymru**

Spring 2018

PACK IT IN

**an action guide for local groups
on Cymru's plastic campaign**



Plastics and single use packaging

Plastic use has become the norm, but it's time to rethink our dependency on it.

Plastic is a cheap, accessible and versatile material. These qualities make it one of the largest contributors to our ever-growing landfill sites, the UK's litter problem and the throwaway society we live in.

The method of production of plastics is also seriously harmful to our planet and contributing to climate change.

Plastic is quickly becoming one of our generation's biggest threats to the environment.

This action guide will give you some of the tools and information you need to tackle the problem of plastic and to help Wales **Pack It In**.

Did you know?

Every piece of plastic ever made still exists in one form or another, other than what's been incinerated. For example, a plastic bottle can last for up to 450 years in the marine environment, slowly fragmenting into smaller and smaller pieces called microplastics. These are entering our food chain, and harming our wildlife.

The problem with plastic

Plastic isn't good for the environment. It is made from crude oil and natural gases, and the huge amount of energy needed for plastic production means it has a serious role to play in climate change.



15% of the world's oil demand goes into making plastics



It's estimated that **100,000** marine animals are killed each year from plastic entanglement/ingestion



Worldwide, more than **1 million** plastic bottles are bought every minute, many of which end up on our coastlines.



Packaging accounts for **over 40%** of total plastic usage, used once, then thrown away



Plastic & Single-Use Pollution

Most of the plastic and litter found on streets and coastal areas are single use items, which means the product is used once, sometimes for just minutes by the consumer, then spends decades, if not centuries on earth, degrading in our environment.

It's time to **Pack It In**, to start refusing plastics, opting for less packaging, and switching from nasty plastics to compostable, reusable and completely recyclable alternatives that won't exist forever.

Know your plastics

Here is a quick introduction to some of the different methods, materials and terms used for plastics.

Recycling cannot be our end goal, so we need to look at reducing dependency on plastics made from crude oil, while moving towards alternative options that allow us to strive for a fully circular economy in Wales - without having to compromise our favourite take away.

There's now a fantastic range of compostable alternatives to single use plastics, which are kinder to the environment. At the moment however, Wales doesn't have the best infrastructure to deal with compostables and bioplastics. But an increase in market demand and a change in consumer behaviour will boost the need for better infrastructure and kickstart a new generation of circular recycling.



Virgin plastic

Virgin plastic means that crude oil and natural gas has been used to make brand new plastic, usually in the form of pellets ready to be formed into brand new products. Many of these products are used just once and thrown away. Making brand new plastic, though cheap, should not be at the expense of the earth.



Recycled plastic

Recycling is great, but cannot be the end goal to tackling our waste problem. Much of the time recycled plastic is in fact 'downcycled' into products that cannot be further recycled down the line, e.g. carpets. When these products have fulfilled their duty, they will end up in landfill or be incinerated. What we need is for materials to be continuously recycled as many times as possible.



Degradable

Watch out for plastics labelled as 'degradable'. Many companies use this as a marketing term to make people believe they are better than 'normal' plastics, which they're not. They are usually coated with a chemical which will help the plastic break down more quickly; however it will still gradually break down into small pieces of plastic.



Biodegradable

Biodegradable will generally break down faster than average plastics. However, similarly to 'degradable' plastics they use additives to help them break down more quickly. These items do not degrade quickly enough to be classified as compostable, and if they end up in landfill they will not have the correct atmosphere they need to fully biodegrade.



Compostable

Bioplastics and compostable plastics are made from natural fibres and materials such as plants (waste, starch or protein products). Being certified 'compostable' means that in theory these products should fully degrade into compost in a specified amount of time or even in your home garden compost (depending on the product).^{*} These plastics can generate around 40% less CO₂ than other plastics.



^{*} **Note:** bioplastics and compostable need the right atmosphere (usually commercial composting facilities) to break down into compost. If these products are thrown to the ground, or end up in the sea, they will not be able to fully biodegrade. Therefore this option does not solve our litter issue in Wales and we will need to strive for better infrastructure to make the use of these plastics worthwhile.



What do Friends of the Earth Cymru want?

To see radical change, we need movement from grassroots level and at governmental levels too.

Recycling should not be the end goal

Wales is third best country in the world for recycling, which is something we should be proud of. However, we need to tackle plastic waste at its source, by reducing our dependency on it.

Wales has the potential to pave the way for better, more sustainable packaging solutions, and putting in place firm commitments to tackling our plastic waste crisis. Here are our aims:

- 1. Ban on disposable plastics and packaging**
Friends of the Earth Cymru are working towards banning disposable plastics in Wales. We believe more emphasis is needed on manufacturers and producers of plastics to change their ways of working, to make it easier for consumers to make sustainable choices at the point of purchase. For example, a ban on polystyrene would encourage manufacturers to change, businesses to use alternative materials, which in turn means that consumers won't be made to buy/receive polystyrene.
- 2. Tax on unnecessary plastics**
A small charge on disposable unnecessary plastics, similar to the hugely successful 5p plastic bag levy, could help encourage change in consumer behaviour. Imagine having a 5p charge on a plastic straw, or 20p on a coffee cup, or plastic cutlery, many people would soon start to refuse these items and move to reusable or sustainable alternatives.
- 3. Deposit Return Scheme in Wales/UK**
Deposit Return Schemes are proven to be effective in other countries and Friends of the Earth Cymru will be working with the Welsh Government and other NGO's on making a DRS possible in Wales.

Local Groups and Members: What can I do?

Action 1 –

Change begins at home

As an individual who cares about the amount of plastic you're using, you can use these pointers to help you lessen your dependency on plastics and tackle plastic consumption.

Refuse

If you don't truly need it, or you can get the same product that does not come in plastic, go for the non-plastic version. Try and refuse all non-recyclable plastics.

Reduce

If you can't refuse, then start to reduce your plastic purchases.

Reuse

Switch to reusable cups, straws, and sustainable alternatives where you can.

Repair

Instead of buying new, try and salvage what you have, repair what you can and reuse.

Repurpose

Get crafty and repurpose your old non-recyclable plastics. Think plastic bottle plant hangers,

Recycle

At the end of its life, make sure to recycle what you can.



Action 2 –

Encourage local businesses

Being environmentally friendly is on the lips of many consumers these days. People are becoming more and more aware of the changing environment and want to do their bit to help. Investing in reusable, recyclable and compostable packaging is a smart move for any business.

You can help your favourite businesses to phase out non-recyclable plastics and polystyrene by encouraging them to swap to more sustainable alternatives. The more people and businesses know you want something to be different, the more likely they are to make positive changes. See www.foe.cymru/plastic-waste for resources.

Action 3 –

Engage with your community

Plastics has proven to be a very popular subject, one that many people can relate to and are passionate about. To spread the word, it's key to engage with your community. Here are some suggestions of how you can mobilise in your area:

Set up a stall

Getting involved at events with a stall whether at a festival, college or craft fair - it's a great place to highlight the campaign and get new people involved.

Organise a 'repair café'

A repair café is a meeting in which people repair household electrical and mechanical devices, computers, bicycles, clothing, etc. These are becoming hugely popular, it's a great way to meet new people, discuss plastic issues and do something positive.

We've teamed up with Purely Disposables to offer a 10% discount on sustainable packaging - visit purelydisposables.co.uk and use offer code FOE10. Contact Charles on 01495 773433 for more info and free samples to kickstart your campaigning.