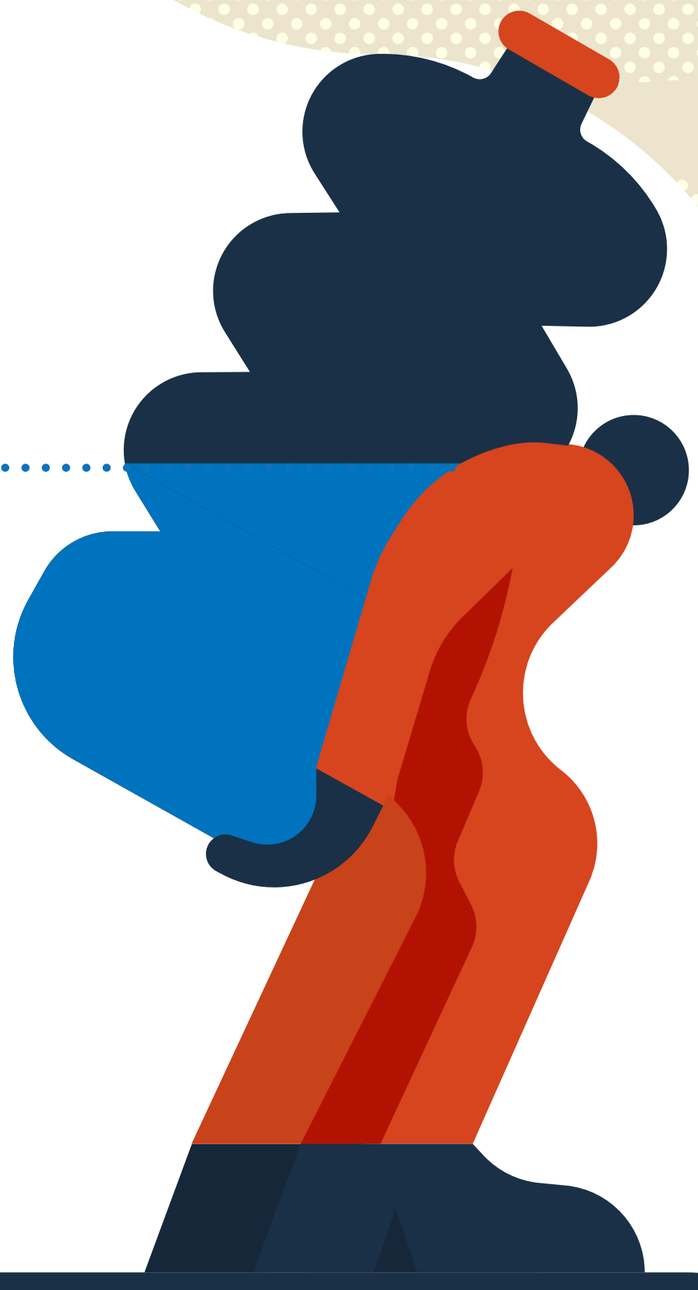
To fight plastic pollution,

BEWARE OF PLASTIC FAKE OUTS.

More than 400 million tons of plastic are produced worldwide every year.

More than 1/3 of all plastics produced are single-use packaging.



In addition to the impact generated by plastics throughout their life cycle, the problem is that we still don't know how to deal with the millions of tons of plastic waste produced.

1/3 OF PLASTIC WASTE

ENDS UP IN THE ENVIRONMENT EVERY YEAR AND POLLUTES LAND, RIVERS AND OCEANS FOR CENTURIES.

Faced with the extent of the damage caused by plastic pollution, some “environmentally friendly" solutions and other alternatives are emerging. But when we take a closer look, their impact sometimes seems limited or even counter-productive: these are plastic fake outs.

We'll highlight 3 of them, as well as some true solutions to tackle plastic pollution!

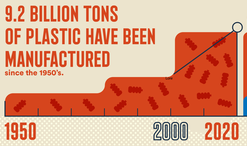
PLASTIC FAKE OUT

01 RELYING ON RECYCLING TO ELIMINATE ALL OUR PLASTIC WASTE

"Yeah, anyway, recycling's useless..."
No, recycling is part of the solution, and it is important to continue to sort our waste, but the mistake would be to believe that it can absorb all the plastics we use: it is technically impossible at the moment.

In addition, at the end of the day, recycling does not solve the real problem: our production and consumption of plastic far exceeds our capacity to properly treat plastic waste.

9.2 BILLION TONS OF PLASTIC HAVE BEEN MANUFACTURED
since the 1950's.



3/4 represent 6.3 billion tons of waste for which no sustainable solution has been found to date.

1/4 are still in use.

While recycling seems to be a good solution, in reality, few plastics are given a second life:

Pure products of the petrochemical industry, plastics do not disappear on their own when we no longer need them.

AT GLOBAL LEVEL

- **14%** of plastic packaging is sorted. Only 10% is recycled and merely 2% will be recycled more than once.
- **14%** are burned in incinerators to be converted into fuel, but they give off harmful emissions. In the end, 30 % of the initial volume is left, which is called the bottom ash. Highly toxic, it must be stored in hazardous waste storage sites.
- **40%** go to landfills. If landfills are not controlled, the chemical compounds in the waste can gradually seep into the soil and groundwater.
- **32%** end up in the environment where they decompose very very slowly, threatening the environment and biodiversity.

IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

OF THE 29 MILLION TONS OF PLASTIC WASTE COLLECTED ANNUALLY IN THE EU,

ONLY 1/3 IS RECYCLED (31%)

The average European consumes

120 KG OF PLASTIC PER YEAR

Why can't we recycle ALL plastics? There are several reasons for this.

01 THERE ARE TOO MANY TYPES OF DIFFERENT PLASTICS:

Plastic is the result of a complex chemical process called polymerization. In simple terms, small molecules react with each other to form larger molecules with the addition of adjuvants and additives to form our various plastics.

Today, 6 types of plastics are used to manufacture the vast majority of our packaging. They all have different properties, integrate toxic additives and the same product may be composed of several different plastics and materials. These plastics therefore require separate treatments, which makes their recycling complex. In addition, the technology we have today does not allow us to collect recycled material of sufficient quality from all plastics.

Today, PET and HDPE from bottles and flasks are the easiest to recycle into other products:

While there are ongoing developments in some European countries, to date, other plastics are generally not recycled:

02 RECYCLING PLASTIC IS NOT PROFITABLE

This may seem counterintuitive, but virgin plastic costs much less than recycled materials.

To recycle plastic in a closed circuit, a whole host of expensive steps must be followed: collecting it, sorting it, cleaning and decontaminating it, crushing it into flakes that must be washed and then transforming them into pellets ready to be reused.

At the end of the process, we don't recover large quantities of recycled plastic, and on top of this it is of lower quality. Either we are forced to add new raw material or we use it to integrate inferior quality products. This is called downcycling.

In Europe, almost half of the plastic collected for recycling cannot be recycled for health, safety, quality and contamination reasons.

With the decline in oil prices, virgin plastic costs very little. And the more virgin plastic there is on the market, the cheaper it will be.

Furthermore, the current market price of virgin plastic does not take into account all the costs of its impacts on society and the environment throughout its life (from the CO2 released during its production to the pollution it causes when it becomes waste).

CONCLUSION

Economics is ruthless and on the side of the industry, the equation is easy to solve: new plastic wins hands down!

03
THERE IS TOO MUCH PLASTIC TO RECYCLE.

We produce so much plastic waste in Western countries that the flow - which in part is of poor quality - has become unmanageable and unprofitable for our infrastructures. As a result, we send it to the other end of the world.

China was, for more than 30 years, the main destination for plastic waste from the rest of the world.

Nearly half of the world's plastic production was sent there - the most contaminated and least usable waste - to be melted down into pellets. In January 2018, the Chinese authorities took a harder line on the contaminating non-recyclable materials which were sent to the country. Since then, the country intends to fight against local pollution but also prioritize its own plastic waste collection system.

From 2018 onwards, waste-exporting countries began to target South-East Asia :

In Thaïland
waste imports were multiplied by 70 between January and April 2018 compared to the same period in the previous year.

In Vietnam
a major terminal refused to accept more scrap after collecting more than 8,000 containers filled with plastic and paper in May 2018.

In Malaysia
nearly 150 illegal recycling plants have sprung up, discharging toxic wastewater into waterways and polluting the air with the fumes from burning waste.

Cambodia
declared in July 2019 that it was "not a garbage can" after discovering in the port of Sihanoukville nearly 83 containers of illegal waste from the United States and Canada.

In Indonesia
49 containers parked in the port of Batam Island were returned in July 2019 to Australia, France, Germany, Hong Kong and the United States because their contents violated regulations on the import of hazardous and toxic waste.

In the Philippines
69 Canadian containers sent in 2013, filled with waste falsely called "plastic for recycling" (household garbage, bottles, plastic bags, newspapers, electronic waste and soiled diapers), were sent back in June 2019 after a long diplomatic battle.

Faced with the accumulation of waste, exporting countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have fallen back on landfilling or incinerating their recyclable waste, polluting the air and soil in the process.

Recycling: rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Recycling in no way addresses the root of the problem: the colossal production of plastic upstream. In this context, the European legislative framework does not yet encourage manufacturers to reduce their plastic production.

Going round in circles:

Producer responsibility organizations focus their actions on raising the awareness of citizens on sorting and recycling, putting the responsibility of this system on their shoulders without ever questioning the source of the problem, which is their exponential production of plastic.

THE TRUE SOLUTION

SORT YOUR WASTE, BUT FIRST AND FOREMOST LIMIT YOUR PLASTIC CONSUMPTION.

Sorting is one of the first actions in favor of the environment adopted by citizens, and it is an excellent thing! If waste is not sorted, it has no chance of being recycled.

Recycling is not optimal for plastic, but it is still very effective for other materials such as glass, steel or cardboard, which are recycled many times over.

Coupled with a plastic reduction policy, recycling is part of the solution. This is the path taken by the European Union in its plastics strategy:

By 2021, a series of plastic products (single-use cutlery and plates, straws, cotton buds, balloon sticks, oxodegradable plastics, food and beverage containers as well as cups for beverages made of expanded polystyrene) will be banned.

By 2026, EU Member States will have to ambitiously and sustainably reduce the consumption of cups for beverages and food containers.

By 2030, all plastic packaging placed on the EU market is either reusable or can be recycled in a cost-effective manner.

With plastic production likely to increase by 40% by 2030, it is an illusion to rely entirely on recycling. In addition, the production and use of plastics must be reduced at the source.

Plastic pollution is often reduced to a problem of incivility and waste management. However, the best waste is waste which is not produced at all. To solve the problem of plastic pollution, we must act at the source. To achieve this, everyone can take their share of responsibility: companies, local authorities and ourselves, because we are all part of the solution.

What can we do?!

PUT PRESSURE ON BUSINESSES

Much of the world's plastic pollution is generated by a handful of brands whose products we consume and packaging we throw away on a daily basis.

Every year, the Break Free From Plastic movement conducts an audit of plastic pollution documenting the brands found on plastic waste collected at clean-ups to hold plastic polluting companies accountable.

THE AUDIT SHOWS THAT COCA-COLA, PEPSICO AND NESTLÉ ALONE ACCOUNT FOR **14% OF PLASTIC POLLUTION WORLDWIDE.**

AT OUR SCALE, WE CAN RETHINK THE WAY WE CONSUME

The more we change our purchasing behavior, the greater the impact on brands and players in the sector.

WE REFUSE OVER PACKAGED PRODUCTS

WE INFORM OURSELVES ON WHAT WE'RE BUYING

WE PRIORITIZE REUSABLE PRODUCTS AND BUY IN BULK

WE DON'T GET INFLUENCED BY MARKETING

WE CAN LAUNCH AND SUPPORT CAMPAIGNS TO GET BRANDS TO REACT

I BOYCOTT

REQUIRE OUR LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO TAKE ACTION

At the local level, authorities can experiment with alternatives to plastics and implement tangible solutions. If this involves rethinking certain habits and needs, it also encourages the development of local actors and contributes to rebuilding social ties.

01
Eliminate single-use packaging and plastics in their public procurement

IN BARCELONA (SPAIN)
in all municipal services, the use of single-use plastics must be replaced by sustainable alternatives such as water fountains and carafes.

Encourage your city to get rid of plastic bottles: have a look at Surfrider Foundation Europe's good practice guide on plastic bottle-free cities.

READ THIS

02
Ban or regulate the use of disposable plastic products in public places or events

IN BRUSSELS (BELGIUM)
the city has banned single-use plastics in festivals.

Discover the Surfrider Foundation Europe charter to organize eco-friendly events

READ THIS

03
Facilitate access to single-use plastic alternatives

Support the ban on disposable plastics with measures facilitating access to reusable alternatives for all:
→ water fountains in public spaces,
→ sharing of reusable dishes,
→ promotion of retailers offering reusable packaging,
→ setting up a local refund system for reusing packaging — etc.

IN FREIBURG (GERMANY)
since 2016 the city has been providing retailers with returnable and reusable cups for hot drinks to take away. 26,000 "Freiburg cup" are now in circulation in the city's 112 cafés.

04
Mobilize citizens to take up the zero-waste challenge at the local level

ROUBAIX (FRANCE)
organizes a Zero Waste Family Challenge. Since 2016, 500 Roubaix families have participated in the challenge and benefitted from workshops and guidance.

ELIMINATE PLASTIC FROM OUR DAILY LIVES

To drastically reduce our plastic waste, we can act at the source and stop consuming it, this is the challenge of the zero-waste movement.

This means choosing products that are more sustainable within their lifetime, reusable or refillable, without packaging, and optimizing their end of life. No waste should be incinerated or sent to landfill and no toxic substances should end up in the soil, water or air.

Saying this makes sense, but how can we limit our plastic consumption when it is absolutely EVERYWHERE?

Where should I start?
The list of solutions is long, but here's where to start:

AT HOME
Fix things rather than throw them away. You can find tutorials on the internet or get help from an expert:

REPAIRCAFÉ

AT THE GROCERY STORE

Bring a reusable shopping bag so you don't have to buy one.

Favor as much as possible local shops and short loops.

AT WORK

Bring reusable containers for your lunch breaks.

Use your own reusable cup for the coffee machine.

To go further...

MAKE YOUR OWN CLEANING AND COSMETIC PRODUCTS

OCEAN CAMPUS' TUTORIALS

GET COACHED TO BE MOTIVATED

The Ocean's Zero application developed by Surfrider Europe is your personal assistant, which brings you through challenges towards a zero-waste way of life.

IOS | ANDROID

ENJOY GOOD BOOKS (WHICH CAN BE BORROWED FROM THE LIBRARY) TO ADOPT THE TIPS OF ZERO-WASTE EXPERTS

Zero Waste Home – The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life by Reducing Your Waste by Bea Johnson.
Producing virtually no waste while reducing expenses by 40% is the challenge Bea Johnson and her family have taken up. She provides over a hundred tips on how to do this in this book.

Famille presque Zéro Déchet by Jérémie Pichon et Bénédicte Moret.
Here, another family, French this time, recounts the torments of their zero-waste experience. A funny and honest story with good anecdotes and a multitude of practical tips.

SUPPORT THE NGOS, WHICH AMPLIFY OUR VOICES:

Because legislative measures are vital to change practices, NGOs are joining forces to bring citizens' demands to local, national, European and international public institutions:

At the global level:

The **Break Free From Plastic** movement brings together 1900 NGOs which demand massive reductions in single-use plastics and push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis. Member organizations run joint campaigns to have the strongest possible impact, including on companies. The movement publishes an annual plastic pollution audit report which identifies the world's top corporate plastic polluters:

BREAK FREE FROM PLASTIC

At the European level:

Rethink Plastic Alliance, a member of the Break Free From Plastic movement, brings together leading European NGOs (Surfrider Foundation Europe, Zero Waste Europe, Greenpeace, Client Earth, etc) in the fight against plastic pollution. Its objective is to work with European policy makers to design solutions to fight plastic pollution.

The alliance has been particularly involved in the drafting of the European Directive on single-use plastics which must now be transposed into the national law of each Member State by July 2021. It has fought to inform on the dramatic environmental and health impacts of single use plastics, to demonstrate that alternatives are within reach, to justify the need for restrictive measures and to frame definitions so that they do not allow certain products to escape the regulation.

Rethink Plastic alliance obtained key measures on all single-use plastics covered by the Directive, with no exemption granted for bioplastics.

For our part, we can convey their message to as many people as possible on social networks, support their campaigns, sign their petitions and take part in their actions.

RETHINK PLASTIC ALLIANCE

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RETHINK PLASTIC | #break free from plastic | Life | PLASTIC SOLUTIONS FUND

SOURCES
Surfrider Foundation Europe | Dalberg & WWF | WWF | Plastic Atlas | Conversio | National Geographic | ADEME | Break free from plastic | Rethink plastic alliance