



Overview

Only 9% of all plastic waste ever made has been recycled. So where does the rest of the plastic go? A vast majority of plastic pollution accumulates in [landfills](#), where it then makes its way into the environment and, eventually, into the oceans. Plastics can withstand extreme and harsh conditions and can take hundreds of years to decompose in landfills and the environment. It is in the [water we drink](#) – even the [air we breathe](#) – and has major implications for [human health](#). However, plastic pollution doesn't just affect the environment and human health, it is also a huge economic burden.

Economic Costs of Plastic Pollution

- Single-use plastic bags [costs retailers 4 billion dollars](#) annually.
- The cost of plastics clean up is significant for taxpayers:
 - California tax payers contribute [\\$428 billion](#) per year to clean up plastic through storm drain management, street sweeping, and marine clean ups.
 - In 2015, the North Carolina Department of Transportation spent over [15 million dollars](#) to remove almost 7.5 million pounds of litter.
- [Eight million metric tons](#) of plastic end up in the oceans each year, leading to [13 billion dollars](#) in damage to marine ecosystems.
- Single-use plastic waste [costs the U.S.](#) more than 2.2 trillion USD per year.

Economic Benefits of Reusables

- According to the [World Economic Forum](#), the economic benefit of transitioning to a circular economy that aims to use resources for as long as possible is estimated to be worth more than one trillion dollars in material savings.
- The Recycling Partnerships "[State of Curbside Recycling in 2020](#)" report estimates that 370,000 full time equivalent jobs would be produced from picking up recyclable materials produced from homes via curbside recycling (approximately 37.4 million tons of recyclable material).
- This [same report](#) estimates that implementing curbside recycling to its full potential would conserve annual energy and achieve the equivalent of removing 20 million cars from U.S. highways.

Solutions

Every plastic grocery bag costs about one penny to produce and each paper bag costs four or five cents to produce. Many states are implementing bag fees to combat these costs. [Washington DC's bag fee program](#) resulted in 75% people reducing plastic bag use, 85% stores reporting a neutral or positive impact from the fee, and less litter surrounding the stores. Los Angeles' 10 cent fee on plastic bags led to a [90% drop](#) in bag usage.

Eliminating grocery store's needs for single-use bags could mean [thousands of dollars in annual savings](#) for grocery stores.