

# Plastics News

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## Industry must share burden to reduce plastic pollution

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The United States is among the top 20 global contributors to plastic marine debris. Even so, Bill Carteaux, president and CEO of the Plastics Industry Association (PLASTICS), asserts that banning single-use plastics is "counterproductive" in protecting our environment ["The wrong solution for our waste problems," March 5, Page 6].

At the same time, he suggests that single-use products like carryout bags and straws are just as vital as life-saving blood bags and syringes and as useful as the plastic wrap that potentially extends the life of perishables like cucumbers.

But no government has banned blood bags, syringes, or plastic-wrapped cucumbers. They are banning non-essential convenience plastics that commonly become unsightly litter, pollute waterways, and cost millions of dollars in equipment damage, worker injury, and lost profits as contaminants in recycling. In fact, **8 of the top 10 global contributors to aquatic trash** are single-use food service plastics like bottles and caps, straws and stirrers, carryout bags, and take-out containers. All of these problematic single-use items are easily relinquished or replaced by reusable alternatives.

However one feels about bans as the solution to plastic pollution, one cannot ignore the existing reality: taxpayers and governments are paying the costs for litter cleans-ups and recycling, not the companies who profit from their manufacture. **PSI supports governments' authority to enact legislation** — including bans and fees — to fulfill those responsibilities.

We do agree with Mr. Carteaux, however, that solid waste management systems need improvements to capture recyclable products like bottles (at curbside) and plastic bags (in retail collection locations), and that doing so will likely reduce the flow of those products into waterways. We too are

dismayed "to see that bottle where it shouldn't be and its impact on ecosystems," and we also see "an uncaptured economic resource." We agree with Mr. Carteau that "addressing those issues would create jobs, lessen the amount of material going to landfill and help make recycling as routine as brushing our teeth."

But we disagree with Mr. Carteau when he states that more plastic products would be recyclable "if not for state and local governments' lack of sorting technology and equipment, insufficient access to curbside collection and barriers to wider adoption of conversion technologies." The burden for solving plastic pollution should not be carried by state and local governments alone. Across the country, governments are struggling to manage single-use plastics in the face of **reduced recycling markets**, shrinking waste management budgets, and few other options.

Education and outreach to citizens, which governments have been doing for decades, is an important step — but on its own, it is expensive, slow, and will never effect behavior change to the same degree as common sense legislation. The plastic pollution issue is growing rapidly and needs to be solved now. So, governments are turning to bans. California and Hawaii ban plastic bags statewide. More than 100 jurisdictions ban various polystyrene products. Dozens of cities limit bottled water. Seattle, in effect, banned plastic straws and utensils. Bans are on the rise.

Mr. Carteau states that PLASTICS welcomes waste reduction and product stewardship. Taking that cue, we invite PLASTICS and other industry groups to take an active role in the entire lifecycle of plastic packaging. We applaud ongoing **industry efforts to fund waste management and recycling infrastructure in Southeast Asia**. Now, we ask you to take the next step closer to home: help California and other state and local governments in the U.S. by taking part in extended producer responsibility for packaging, designing plastic products to be safer and more recyclable, helping to expand recycling infrastructure and education, and focusing on the production of high-value products instead of problematic convenience items.

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