



**SATURDAY
15 SEPTEMBER**

World Plastic Attack Day

PRESS RELEASE

World Plastic Attack Day – September 15 2018

#WorldCleanupDay

'Plastic attack' battle lines are being drawn. On Saturday September 15, thousands of frustrated shoppers in more than 100 towns and cities across 20 countries plan to stage mass protests at supermarkets against harmful packaging - they have declared it to be World Plastic Attack Day.

This growing global army of peaceful protestors is gearing up to give back all throwaway, avoidable, single-use plastic to supermarkets. Plastic attacks have become a worldwide movement after they went viral on social media this year. Thousands of protestors have taken part so far around the world. They have been shared on social media and the news, sparking many copycat protests, and now a Global Plastic Attack Facebook group, which is acting as a hub to publicise events worldwide.

HOW IT WORKS

The idea of this global event is that shoppers wield the power of growing collective pressure on supermarkets to drive change, whilst publicising the continuing scale of the problem. The campaigners stand at shop entrances and ask everyone who shops to buy their goods and then, en masse, rip off all the plastic that they believe is not necessary, collect it all up in trolleys, record the content and politely hand it back to the shops.

One of the campaigners, Alex Morss, said: "Teams stand outside each store and invite all shoppers who agree, to join in, so we will easily involve on average 200 or more shoppers per hour at each store, obviously multiplied by a large number of stores and repeated events.

She added: "The public is being fully supportive, and so are the shop floor staff. Volunteers collect up everyone's plastic waste in trolleys, photograph and analyse it to see which brands and stores are the worst offenders, before presenting it back to the shops. By doing this we have calculated that a nation the size of the UK could easily fill more than 10,000 trolleys per hour with this amount of avoidable single use plastic wrapping - and typically half of what gets ripped off is not even currently recyclable."

Ms Morss, from Bristol UK community group OnebyOne Conservation, one of the network of groups behind the plastic campaign, added: "One of the world's biggest mountains is a plastic one - a giant almost everlasting symbol of disgrace. The moment plastic leaves the shop door, it is out of sight and out of mind for supermarkets but a very long-term burden for the world. Research has shown the vast majority of it never gets recycled. Taxpayers, wildlife and the environment pay the costs, not the stores. Despite all the publicity in recent times and higher awareness than ever, there is still very little regulation to make massive producers and sellers of plastic-wrapped

goods behave in a more environmentally responsible and sustainable manner. And there is no transparency about the full extent of their plastic footprint.”

Campaigners have set up a Global Plastic Attack Facebook group with 8,000 supporters. They share news, videos and photos demonstrating that very often the single use plastic mentality is not the only option, and often not justifiable using the excuse of food waste, which has been argued by some commentators who have defended some uses of plastic packaging. The food waste argument for using plastic was widely challenged by a report published by the EU Institute for Environmental Policy this year, which showed food waste has increased as plastic usage has gone up, and that food waste and sustainability are often not the crucial reasons for the chosen packaging.

The plastic attackers have criticised the abundant use of non-essential plastic used for aesthetic/marketing or bulk-buy-driven reasons, the widespread use of non-recyclable containers and wrappers, the avoidable single-use mentality, the commonplace wrapping of ‘organic’ vegetables in plastic when non-organic are not, as well as “over-packaging” on many items. They say other sustainable alternatives are viable - and that often no wrapping would work fine, as is seen in many green grocers, organic and smaller independent stores. The campaigners encourage shoppers to bring their own reusable containers and bags, and paper or biodegradable food composting bin bags for loose groceries. They point out these are being used anyway for kitchen food bins, so they are not an extra burden on the environment.

Belgium campaigner Christophe Steyeart who co-hosts the Global Plastic Attack Facebook group with 8,000 followers, said: “Shops cannot ignore so many thousands of their own customers telling them they are sick of unnecessary plastic. Wake up businesses, the world is demanding change. When people, the customers, change their way of buying and consuming, the industry must comply. Politicians will soon start thinking about their voters, and need to create laws so waste can be banned as much as possible. All parties must listen!”

Fiona Edwards, from Keynsham Plastic Re-action, whose early video of a plastic attack has had more than 18 million views on social media, said: “We have demonstrated without doubt that our actions have overwhelming public support. It seems that people have been unwillingly purchasing all this plastic along with their food, and now they realise they have a choice, and can make their voices heard. They don’t have to be complicit any more.”

The World Plastic Attack Day network of campaign groups have teamed up with World Clean Up Day for September 15, so many campaigners will also be doing litter picks and highlighting the vast volumes of plastic waste that end up in the environment.

World Cleanup Day spokeswoman Tina Urm said: “Scientists are predicting that by 2050 we’ll have more plastic than fish in our oceans. The problem is not just mismanaged waste ending up in our nature, waterways and oceans. It’s about the fact that only 9% of the plastic ever produced has been recycled. And the production of single use plastics is only increasing, while half of the world’s population doesn’t have any access to a proper waste management system. This is the wake-up call we desperately need. Both for producers and businesses to take responsibility and for people who can influence the big picture with their everyday choices.”

A group of researchers and experts has been working under the wing of Let’s do it! Foundation, towards creating The Keep It Clean Plan, to be released around the World Cleanup Day action. The Keep It Clean Plan (which collected support and input also from many other NGOs working on sustainable management of waste) embeds the principles of the zero waste strategy and practice. It consists of recommended actions for businesses, governments, citizens and NGOs to implement specific steps which help tackle the global challenge of mismanaged waste, optimise the management of resources, tapping into the potential of creating jobs and promoting economic development of communities in reuse, repair, recycling and composting activities.

The current Plastic Attack campaign was started this spring by small numbers of frustrated shoppers in the Bristol UK area, who teamed up with like-minded groups around the UK, Belgium and across Europe, sharing videos and photos on social media and quickly spreading the idea around the world.

They say their protests are always polite, law-abiding events, with no littering and no obstruction of checkouts, and everyone shopping is invited to take part. Stores are told in advance and asked

to accept back their waste, and letters are sent to stores, pointing out how many of their own customers are joining in with the protests and demanding change.

The Plastic Attack campaigners also say:

1. Some supermarkets are starting to listen to the message, and making some limited commitments on plastic, but still not enough is being done, and not as fast as it could be. Commitments are too voluntary and often appear to be too driven by profit and marketing priorities and perhaps a lack of incentive to innovate, rather than environmental impacts. We are continuously seeing very many examples, and have hundreds of photographs from our own research, that confirm this to be the case.
2. The responsibility is still being placed far too heavily on the consumer to recycle, instead of removing the source of plastic, which would be possible in many cases. For example, existing voluntary compliance efforts on plastic reduction, endorsed by Wrap UK and supermarkets in the UK Plastics Pact, clearly direct the blame and responsibility on to consumers for not recycling, instead of producers.
3. The term 'recyclable' does not mean the plastic will be recycled. Research suggests only about one tenth to one third of plastic packaging that could be recycled actually gets recycled. In the UK, an estimated one million tonnes of throwaway plastic goes to landfill, incineration or ends up in the sea or as litter in the environment each year.
4. 'Recyclable' does not stop plastic litter and it does not halt the unsustainable and unnecessary use of fossil fuels. Plastic packaging is not biodegradable, not good for the planet, not good for wildlife, not good for tax payers, and crucially not even necessary in very many cases. It does not necessarily prevent food waste, as recent evidence shows.

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NOTE TO EDITORS

Some of the countries taking part in plastic attacks on September 15: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, China, Corsica, England, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Mozambique, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, USA, Wales.

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/PlasticAttackGlobal

Websites: www.plasticattack.co.uk and www.plasticattack.net

More resources:

A whopping 91% of plastic is NOT recycled:

<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/07/plastic-produced-recycling-waste-ocean-trash-debris-environment/>

Less than one third of UK consumers' plastic packaging is recycled:

www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/nov/21/only-a-third-of-uk-consumer-plastic-packaging-is-recycled

Unwrapped: How throwaway plastic is failing to solve Europe's food waste problem.

www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/materials_and_waste/2018/unwrapped_-_throwaway_plastic_failing_to_solve_europes_food_waste_problem.pdf