

NEWS RELEASE

Environmental Leaders Deliver More Than 13,000 Signatures To Legislative Leaders At the State Capitol

Call on Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins to Pass Strong Packaging Reduction Bill and Reject Toxic “Chemical Recycling” Ploy Pushed by Chemical Companies

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Albany, NY - Leaders from the environmental organizations Beyond Plastics, Only One, and Surfrider Foundation delivered 13,326 petition signatures to Senator Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie in Albany urging state legislators to oppose toxic “chemical recycling” and allow the Packaging Reduction & Recycling Infrastructure Act (S4246/A5322) to come up for a vote before the Legislature leaves Albany in June.

The legislation is sponsored by the chairs of the Environmental Conservation Committee in both houses, Assemblymember Deborah Glick and Senator Pete Harckham.

The production, use, and disposal of plastic is one of the greatest environmental and health threats of our time. Not only are plastics turning our oceans into a watery landfill, plastics also pose a threat to our ability to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Made from chemicals and fossil fuels, plastics produce climate-warming greenhouse gasses at every stage of their lifecycle: from extraction to production and disposal. In fact, if plastic were a country, it would be the world’s fifth largest greenhouse gas emitter. The recommendations in New York’s Climate Leadership & Community Protection Act’s scoping plan specifically call on the legislature to pass a strong extended producer responsibility bill to enable the state to reach its climate goals.

“We are in a plastic pollution crisis and New York lawmakers now have an opportunity to do something about it. Plastic pollution damages the environment and our health. And now microplastics have been found in the human body. Time is running out to solve this problem and state legislators need to take action to reduce single-use plastic packaging and not be

pressured by chemical companies to allow toxic chemical recycling to be included in this bill,” said Judith Enck, former EPA regional administrator and president of Beyond Plastics.

The organizations called on New York’s legislative leaders to reject toxic, so-called chemical “recycling”. Chemical “recycling” uses high temperatures, pressure, and/or solvents to melt or boil plastics down to gasses, chemicals, oils, and/or tars. These processes create air pollution and toxic residues. Most chemical “recycling” turns plastics into polluting fossil fuels, but plastic-to-plastic applications also create toxic pollution. These polluting facilities are often placed in low-income communities of color, including communities in the South where environmental regulations are more lax. The financials for these projects simply do not work without large public subsidies. Multiple proposed projects around the country have folded because the public subsidies have fallen through.

Unlike other materials, plastic can't be recycled multiple times and it creates pollution regardless of its form. Even plastic-to-plastic “recycling” turns packaging into other things such as plastic “grass” or polyester clothing, not new packaging. Regardless of how much plastic packaging gets recycled it won't curb the reliance on new plastic production for single-use packaging. Whatever form plastic takes, i.e. packaging, plastic “grass”, or polyester clothing, it includes toxic chemicals and creates microplastic pollution. When a polyester shirt is washed, it releases microplastics into the washing machine water that is discharged. This pollution may make its way into the environment, including the soil, air, and waterways such as the Great Lakes, Lake Champlain, the Hudson and East Rivers, the Atlantic Ocean, and beyond. Microplastics are increasingly being found within the human body, concerning scientists.

“New York has a chance to make a real dent in the plastic pollution crisis that is threatening our environment, our communities, and our health. We ask our elected officials to lead on this critical issue by passing the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act,” said Matt Gove, mid-Atlantic policy manager, Surfrider Foundation.

The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (A5322/S4246) would require companies to cut their single-use packaging in half in 12 years and redesign what’s left to make it reusable, refillable, or actually recyclable. When packaging is discarded, the bill requires the companies who produced it to pay to collect, sort, and manage what’s left, shifting the burden off New York’s tax-payers while providing critical funding for municipal waste reduction and recycling infrastructure.

Plastics contain thousands of added chemicals, many of which are known toxins. Some of the chemicals that have been studied (including phthalates, PFAS, benzene, toluene, heavy metals, and bisphenols) disrupt the human endocrine system and are linked to cancer. Plastic has been found in human blood, placenta, lungs, and breastmilk. The Packaging Reduction & Recycling Infrastructure Act also bans a dozen toxic chemicals in packaging, including those listed above.

“By passing the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act, New York has the power to protect residents from toxic pollution, and demonstrate that economic progress and environmental responsibility are not mutually exclusive. If our state hopes to be an

environmental leader, we must be at the front of the fight to turn off the plastic tap," said Trevor Jones, campaign manager at Only One.

Why does New York need to pass the Packaging Reduction & Recycling Infrastructure Act now?

- 40% of plastic production is to make single-use items that clog our landfills, pollute our air, water, and soil when burned in incinerators, or end up littering our environment.
- New York's 10 municipal waste incinerators produce hundreds of thousands of tons of air pollution and toxic ash each year as well as speeding climate change.
- New York City, alone, spends \$429 million each year to export its waste to incinerators and landfills in other states or to the Finger Lakes in Upstate NY.

The groups called on Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie to reject toxic "chemical recycling" and bring the Packaging Reduction & Recycling Infrastructure Act to the floor for a vote before the legislature adjourns in June.

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