



## City of Big Lake Environmental Education Newsletter

Special Edition

June 5<sup>th</sup> is World Environment Day!



### World Environment Day 2018: #BeatPlasticPollution

I hope that Earth Day 2018 catalyzed a reduction of plastic use in your life. However, if you need more inspiration, World Environment Day is here to help!

As you know from previous newsletters, the exponential growth of plastics is now threatening the survival of our planet. In response, World Environment Day 2018 is dedicated to providing the information and inspiration needed to fundamentally change human attitude and behavior about plastics.

#### The Facts

- The scale of the challenge is daunting.
  - Since the 1950s, the production of plastic has outpaced that of almost every other material. Much of the plastic we produce is designed to be thrown away after one use. As a result, plastic packaging accounts for about half of the plastic waste in the world.
- Our ability to cope with plastic waste is already overwhelmed.
  - Only 9% of the nine billion tons of plastic the world has ever produced has been recycled. Most ends up in landfills, dumps or in the environment. If current consumption patterns and waste management practices continue, then by 2050 there will be around 12 billion tons of plastic litter in landfills and the environment. If the growth in plastic production continues at its current rate, then the plastics industry may account for 20% of the world's total oil consumption.
- Most plastics do not biodegrade.
  - Instead, they slowly break down into smaller fragments known as microplastics. Studies suggest that plastic bags and containers made of styrofoam can take up to thousands of years to decompose, contaminating soil and water. Microplastics, if ingested by fish, can enter our food chain. They have been found in commercial table salt and studies show that 90% of bottled water contains plastic particles. Worryingly, little is known about the impacts of microplastics on human health.
- The most common single-use plastics found in the environment are, in order of magnitude, cigarette butts, plastic drinking bottles, plastic bottle caps, food wrappers, plastic grocery bags, plastic lids, straws and stirrers, other types of plastic bags, and foam

take-away containers. These are the waste products of a throwaway culture that treats plastic as a disposable material rather than a valuable resource to be harnessed.

- Plastic waste causes a plethora of problems when it leaks into the environment.
  - Plastic bags can block waterways and exacerbate natural disasters. By clogging sewers and providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes and pests, plastic bags can increase the transmission of vectorborne diseases like malaria.
  - High concentrations of plastic materials, particularly plastic bags, have been found blocking the airways of hundreds of species. Plastic bags are often ingested by turtles and dolphins who mistake them for food. There is evidence that the toxic chemicals added during the manufacture of plastic transfer to animal tissue, eventually entering the human food chain.
- Styrofoam products, which contain carcinogenic chemicals like styrene and benzene, are highly toxic if ingested, damaging the nervous systems, lungs and reproductive organs. The toxins in styrofoam containers can leach into food and drinks.
- The economic damage caused by plastic waste is vast. Studies suggest that the total economic damage to the world's marine ecosystem caused by plastic amounts to at least \$13 billion every year. The economic, health and environmental reasons to act are clear.
- As of 2015, humans worldwide had generated 6.9 billion tons of plastic waste — under 10 percent of which was recycled. Most of it wound up littered or in landfills.

### You Can Make a Difference

Swap out plastic products, or stop using them entirely. **When a plastic product comes your way, ask yourself: Do I really need this, or can I use something else? Here are a few tips for how individuals can help:**

- 49.4 billion plastic water bottles were sold in the US in 2015, and only 32% were recycled. Get a reusable water bottle.
- Use cloth bags. Reusable grocery bags are extremely popular, but did you know you can get [smaller reusable produce bags](#) for a plastic-free shopping experience?
- Say no to straws. They just become waste, and you probably don't need one!
- If you have a collection of plastic bags at home, recycle them at places like Target and Cub Foods in Monticello

