

FACT SHEET – Sudbury, MA Town Meeting Article: Disposable Plastic Pollution Reduction Bylaw



What Does this Article Do if Approved?

Prohibits food establishments in Sudbury from providing disposable plastic straws, stirrers, or splash sticks to a customer. Disposable straws, stirrers, or splash sticks made from non-plastic materials may only be provided upon request by the customer or using a self-service dispenser.

There are no restrictions on reusable items, or items brought by a customer for personal use. Exceptions are made for persons in need due to a disability or medical condition.

Retail establishments in Sudbury are prohibited from selling disposable plastic straws, stirrers, or splash sticks, unless non-plastic or reusable alternatives are also available and clearly labeled.

Why Vote Yes for this Article?

We use far too many disposable plastic food service items. Market research firms estimate that between 170 and 390 million disposable plastic straws are used EVERY DAY nationwide.¹ Sudbury's share of this is at least ~10,000 straws per day, enough for 5 laps of the L-S track when laid end-to-end.²

Plastic items are easily lost into the environment, both land and sea, where they can cause ecological harm for hundreds of years. Ecosystems are already under stress around the world and plastic pollution pushes us closer to the tipping point. Plastic in the ocean fragments into tiny microplastic pieces,³ which can accumulate toxins from the water,⁴ be mistaken for food by wildlife of all sizes,⁵ and risk disrupting the very food chains on which our own health and economy depend.⁶

Microplastics are ending up back in the human food supply. A recent World Wildlife Foundation study found that each of us could be eating the equivalent of a credit card worth of microplastic every week.⁷

Small plastic items are not economically recyclable in Sudbury. Plastic straw, stirrers, and splash sticks are too small to be sorted by recycling machinery. Their presence contributes to recycling contamination, as well as the increasing waste management costs paid by Sudbury, its residents, and its businesses.

'Compostable' or 'biodegradable' plastic items are not a good alternative. Many plastics marketed as 'compostable' require the controlled conditions of industrial composting facilities to break down and cause similar problems as conventional plastics when lost into the environment.⁸ Using such materials before the required industrial composting is universally accessible in Sudbury would be irresponsible.

Simple, low-cost alternatives are readily available and already widely in use. A shift to durable, reusable items ultimately saves money for both consumers and retailers, while protecting the environment: a true win-win-win scenario.

"Upon Request" reduces the use of disposable items without stopping those who need or want items. A recent study showed that "upon request" led to an average 32% decrease in total straw usage, all while the majority of businesses reported no appreciable negative effects. Some businesses even indicated a decrease in costs.⁹

You can help reduce plastic pollution in your own community! To learn more or to join this campaign, please email: campaigns@ma.surfrider.org

References

- ¹ Choksi, N. “How a 9-Year-Old Boy’s Statistic Shaped a Debate on Straws.” *New York Times* 19 July 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/business/plastic-straws-ban-fact-check-nyt.html>
- ² Approximately 10000 per day is Sudbury’s proportional share of 170 million straws per day, assuming a Sudbury, MA population of 19,627 (July 2018 Census Bureau Estimate) and a US population of ~327 million. Ten thousand 8-inch straws cover about 2032 meters when laid end-to-end, or more than 5 laps of a standard 400-meter athletics track.
- ³ “What Are Microplastics?” National Ocean Service, NOAA, US Department of Commerce, 8 February 2020. <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/microplastics.html>.
- ⁴ Hirai, H., et al. “Organic micropollutants in marine plastics debris from the open ocean and remote and urban beaches.” *Mar. Pollut. Bull.* **2011**, 62, 1683. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2011.06.004>; Wardrop, P., et al. “Chemical Pollutants Sorbed to Ingested Microbeads from Personal Care Products Accumulate in Fish.” *Environ. Sci. Technol.* **2016**, 50, 4037. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.5b06280>; Lee, H., Shim, W.J., Kwon, J.H. “Sorption capacity of plastic debris for hydrophobic organic chemicals.” *Sci. Total Environ.* **2014**, 470-471, 1542. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2013.08.023>
- ⁵ Kershaw, P.J., et al. “Sources, Fate and Effects of Microplastics in the Marine Environment (Part 2).” GESAMP Reports and Studies, no. 93, **2016**. <http://www.gesamp.org/publications/microplastics-in-the-marine-environment-part-2>; Rotjan, R.D., et al. “Patterns, dynamics, and consequences of microplastic ingestion by the temperate coral, *Astrangia poculata*.” *P. Roy. Soc. B-Biol. Sci.*, **2019**, 20190726. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2019.0726>
- ⁶ Nelms, S.E., et al. “Investing microplastic trophic transfer in marine top predators.” *Environ. Poll.* **2018**, 238, 999-1007. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2018.02.016>; Royte, E. “We Know Plastic Is Harming Marine Life. What About Us?” *National Geographic*, 16 May 2018. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/06/plastic-planet-health-pollution-waste-microplastics/>; Borges, D.R., et al. “Navigating the Global Economy: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Massachusetts Maritime Economy.” Public Policy Center, UMass Dartmouth: Dartmouth, MA, **2017**. <http://publicpolicycenter.org/portfolio-item/navigating-the-global-economy-a-comprehensive-analysis-of-the-massachusetts-maritime-economy/>
- ⁷ de Wit, W.; Bigaud, N. “No Plastic in Nature: Assessing Plastic Ingestion from Nature to People.” *World Wildlife Foundation International*. 2019. <https://www.wwf.org.au/ArticleDocuments/353/pub-no-plastic-in-nature-assessing-plastic-ingestion-from-nature-to-people-jun19.pdf>
- ⁸ *Are Bioplastics the Answer?* in “Better Alternatives Now: B.A.N. List 2.0.” *5 Gyres Institute, et al.*, **2017**. https://www.5gyres.org/s/5Gyres_BANlist2.pdf
- ⁹ Wagner, T.P., Toews, P. “Assessing the use of default choice modification to reduce consumption of plastic straws.” *Detritus*, **2018**, 4, 113. <https://doi.org/10.31025/2611-4135/2018.13734>