



MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH  
AND JOB CREATION



National Environment  
and Planning Agency

# Plastic Pollution: Jamaica's Initial Response

Globally, there has been a major push to address the issue of the improper disposal of plastics and reduce impacts on our oceans and seas. In 2017, the United Nations launched a 'Clean Seas Initiative' which aimed to address marine plastic litter by encouraging governments, the private sector, civil society, and the public to make voluntary commitments to reduce the consumption and production of non-biodegradable plastics.

The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 5.2) in March 2022, at its resumed Fifth meeting, decided to undertake negotiations on an internationally legally binding instrument by 2024 to end plastic pollution. Governments of the 193 UN Member States including the Government of Jamaica, adopted a resolution titled, 'End Plastic Pollution: Towards an internationally legally binding instrument.' By this resolution, the Assembly agreed to set up an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to draft a legally binding agreement by 2024. The agreement is expected to address the full lifecycle of plastics, including production, design, and disposal, as well as the design of reusable and recyclable products and materials.

Several countries, including Jamaica, have already instituted various measures to reduce the import/export, manufacture, and use of specific types of plastics. In support of this agenda, the Government of Jamaica on January 1, 2019, commenced the phased implementation of the ban on the importation, distribution, manufacture, and use of certain types of single use plastics. The ban targeted plastic bags of a specific dimension and thickness, plastic drinking straws, as well as straws attached to the packaging of drink boxes and juice pouches. The ban, which is governed by two Ministerial Orders - The Trade (Plastic Packaging Material) Order, 2018 and The NRCA (Plastic Packaging Material) Order, 2018, also applies to polystyrene foam containers used in the food and beverage industry.



Within CARICOM, Antigua & Barbuda, Guyana, and St. Lucia, have instituted a ban on plastic bags and expanded polystyrene (commonly referred to as 'Styrofoam'). The bans have had varying degrees of success, depending on the practical realities of their implementation.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) on single-use plastic in Jamaica was completed in December 2020. Based on the initial findings on the effectiveness of the ban to date, the RIA reported successes in the use of alternatives to the 'scandal bags', plastic straws, and polystyrene food containers.

Despite these initial findings, an uptick is observed in the use of the black 'scandal bags' in the market districts of some major towns including Downtown Kingston. It is assumed that banned plastic bags in the marketplace could have their origin from two sources: imported undetected through the island's borders, and the possibility of being locally manufactured.

The collaborative arrangement between the National Environment & Planning Agency (NEPA), the Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA),

and the National Compliance and Regulatory Authority (NRCA), although operational, may require further strengthening and



implementation of new strategies to identify and seize illicit entries through the ports of entry and renewed ongoing monitoring of the manufacturing facilities.

Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, tend to be used for plastic packaging and include items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These

include, among other items, grocery bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups, and cutlery.

Plastics in the environment pose significant hazards to wildlife both on land and in the ocean. High concentrations of plastic materials, particularly plastic bags, have been found to block the breathing passages and stomachs of hundreds of different species. Plastic bags in the ocean resemble jellyfish and are often ingested by turtles and dolphins who mistake them for food.

Further, there is emerging evidence that the toxic chemicals added during the manufacturing process transfer from the ingested plastic into the animals' tissues, eventually entering the food chain for humans as well. When plastic breaks down into microplastic particles, it becomes even more difficult to detect and remove from the open oceans. Therefore, the most effective mitigation strategy is to reduce their use.

In 2018 and 2019, the top 10 items collected were plastic bottles, plastic bottle caps, foam pieces, plastic pieces, other plastic bags, foam cups and plates, food wrappers, plastic cups and plates, glass beverage bottles, and foam takeaway containers. According to recent estimates by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 79% of the plastic waste ever produced now sits in landfills, dumps, or in the environment, while about 12% has been incinerated and only 9% has been recycled.

In 2019, nearly 50% of the plastic waste generated globally was plastic packaging. In Jamaica, single-use plastic, and polystyrene (foam) items are among the top 10 items collected from coastal areas on International Coastal Clean-up Day.

