

**GOVERNMENTS PLAY A CRITICAL
ROLE IN MOVING THE WORLD
TO A NO-WASTE SYSTEM
WHEN COMPANIES ARE NOT
OTHERWISE MOTIVATED TO
CHANGE THEIR WAYS.**

Credit: Shutterstock

GOVERNMENTS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN REDUCING PLASTIC POLLUTION

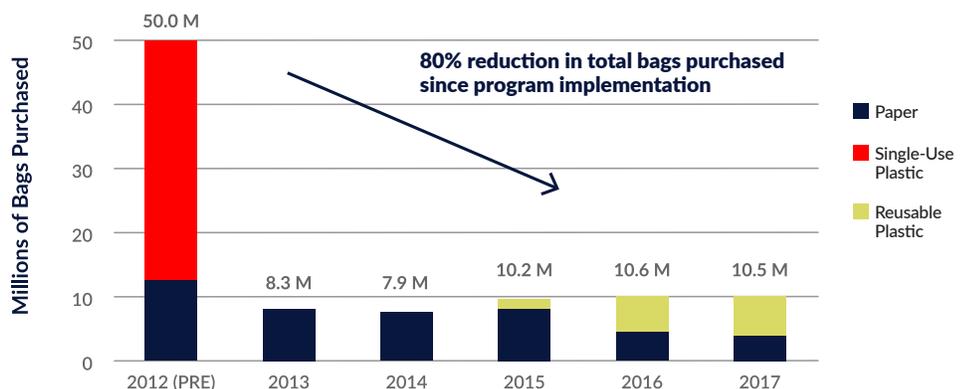
Policies governing the use of plastics are the most effective way to address the problem, and they are becoming more common from the municipal to the national level. Many counties, states and cities are banning or otherwise regulating the use of plastic.

These policies often focus on the most common waste items found in worldwide beach cleanups: utensils, food wrappers, plastic beverage bottles, plastic bottle caps, plastic grocery bags, other plastic bags, straws/stirrers, plastic containers, plastic lids and foam takeout containers. Since all of these items are used once and then thrown away, a logical starting point is to target single-use plastic items.

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE POLICY SOLUTIONS

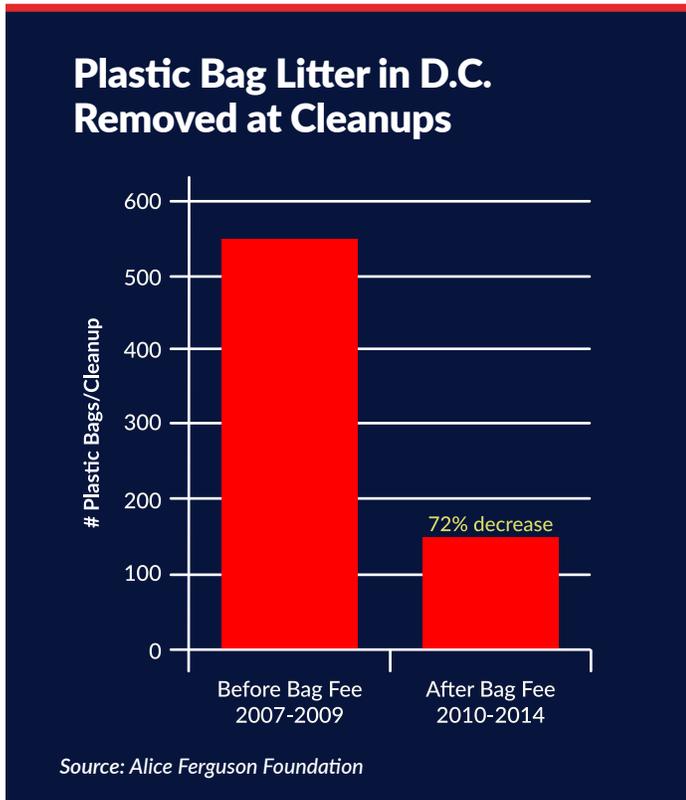
Policies like bans, taxes, deposit return systems and extended producer responsibility can be effective in encouraging single-use plastic reduction. Here are some examples of diverse approaches:

Bag Purchasing Trends in Alameda County



Source: Alameda County Waste Management Authority

- **Alameda County, California**, passed a plastic bag ban and paper bag fee that led to an 80% decline in the use of single-use paper and plastic bags, a 200% increase in the number of shoppers bringing reusable bags or not using a bag at all, and a 44% decrease in plastic bags in county storm drains.



- **Washington, D.C.**, passed a 5-cent plastic and paper bag fee that resulted in more than a 60% reduction in single-use carryout bag consumption. This also resulted in reduced plastic bag litter in D.C.'s Anacostia River.
- **Ontario, Canada**, implemented a deposit program for all alcohol beverage containers, applying a 10-cent deposit to all non-metal containers 630 milliliters and under, and all metal cans 1 liter and under, as well as a 20-cent deposit for non-metal containers larger than 630 milliliters and metal containers larger than 1 liter. Ten years later, the average recovery rate for these containers was over 80%.
- **Maine** implemented a deposit law for all beverages with a few exceptions in 1978. This included a 15-cent deposit on spirits and wine beverage containers, and a 5-cent deposit on all other bottles. In 2017, Maine's bottle redemption rate was 84%.

- **Berkeley, California**, passed a comprehensive ordinance ultimately requiring food vendors to offer only reusables for onsite dining. In the first phase, disposable straws, lids, napkins and utensils will be available by request only. Next, all disposable foodware, including cups and containers, must be certified compostable and free of fluorinated chemicals, with a 25-cent charge for cups. Finally, only reusable foodware will be permitted for on-site dining, with a few compostable exceptions.

Some policies aim to encourage proper disposal of single-use plastics by changing consumer behavior. Others focus on increasing extended producer responsibility — they mandate that producers meet certain target recycling or collection rates, or that manufacturers ensure their products are easily recyclable, cover the cost of cleanup for the waste they generate, and raise awareness about proper waste disposal and the harm that mismanaged waste can inflict. For example, the European Union recently required that tobacco manufacturers be responsible for the cost of handling post-consumption waste of tobacco products.



While the onus to reverse the plastics crisis should primarily fall on companies, governments play a critical role in moving the world to a no-waste system when companies are not otherwise motivated to change their ways.

Policies that call for reductions in the production of plastic are moving the world in the right direction, but additional governmental involvement is needed on this issue to create the policy structure to drive reduction.