

Plastic Is NOT a Environmental Threat



By Tom DeWeese

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I am fed up to my burning ears with the carte blanche castigation of plastic. Plastic is one of the greatest inventions ever, not only for modern society, but also for the environment. If plastic seems to now pose an environmental threat, it's not plastic's fault – but the fault of the environmental movement itself.

The use of plastic reduces the need for other natural resources. Plastic bags, cups, and plates save the need for more paper. It saves the tress the greens are so concerned about. Plastic tables and chairs and lamps also save the demand for wood. Plastic bumpers on cars eliminate the need for chrome, a natural mineral the greens worried about a couple of decades ago – plastic provided the saving solution. And the use of plastic in cars makes them lighter and therefore more fuel efficient. Plastic makes heart transplants possible. Plastic is used in a wide variety of medical devises, without which people would either die or be denied happy, useful lives. There is no natural wood, paper, or glass substitute.

It's interesting to note that the decade-old American obsession with bottled water resulted from environmentalist scares over possible chemicals in municipal tap water. Green radicals like the Natural



Resources Defense Council (NRDC) spewed horror stories of tap water full of rocket fuel, arsenic, germs, feces, lead, and pesticides. Plastic bottles provided the solution. Now the pendulum has swung and we're all supposed to forget the earlier scaremongering over tap water and obey the new scare over water bottles. Crisis to crisis – whatever keeps up the green fundraising and power-building. It's also interesting to note that one of the biggest promoters of the return to tap water is the National Conference of Mayors. Many cities are now taxing each bottle used. A classic move – right out of the government handbook. Vilify it and then tax it.

So the mantra goes, plastic bottles and products are filling the landfills. Says one ad (by a water filter company with an ulterior motive to compete with plastic water bottles), America uses enough plastic water bottles to ring the earth several times in a year. Plastic bottles don't degrade, they say, so they will be in the ground forever. The collectively acceptable answer, of course, is that we simply must ban them and any other use of plastic, if possible.

One corporation using the anti-plastic propaganda is the Whole Foods super market chain which forces its suppliers to provide "sustainable" and recyclable packaging for their products or they will be banned from the store's shelves. The chain also does not use plastic carrier bags. Instead, it uses either paper bags or encourages customers to bring in their own reusable cloth bags. Whole Foods is a large enough force in

the grocery market that such policies force other chains to follow suit. That, of course, is its political strategy.

Whole Foods CEO, John Mackey, is a full-fledged promoter of Sustainable Development as a political policy. He talks of corporations "doing good," through a policy of "Conscious Capitalism." I love the use of those words, "responsible;" "good," "conscious." Says who? Rather than a businessman, Mackey is ultimately promoting his own political agenda on the buying public. That isn't free enterprise; it's a form of activism designed to covertly enforce behavior modification techniques on the buying public.

In addition, Mackey's drive to "do good" has a lot of unintended consequences. First, he has helped to perpetrate lies and prejudices to encourage lawmakers to ban valuable products. That causes job loss in that industry. Second, he is taking away the right of choice from those who don't accept his position. Third, all so-called sustainable policies lead to one specific conclusion – higher prices for consumers. Fourth, his actions may well lead to endangering the health of many consumers. For example, removing plastic bottles for shampoos and conditioners and replacing them with glass bottles will be a hazard in the bathroom when they inevitably fall on the floor.

Finally there is a growing hypocrisy from the do-good faction. Some governments, such as in Fairfax County, Virginia are now charging 5 cents tax for every plastic bag, with the intention of returning us to the paper bags that were banned in the name of environmental protection for trees. The difference now is that the government will get to fill its coffers from the unnecessary regulations it imposed.

Of course, when political power is at stake, consumers are simply pawns to be manipulated. In San Francisco, where the city government banned the use of plastic bags, one resident wrote, *"I remember when it began to rain last year while I was*

carrying my groceries home in a paper bag. As I chased my cans down the street, I cursed our idiot mayor and whoever among his stooges had decided to ban rainproof plastic bags in San Francisco. Paper is certainly biodegradable, for the process started even as I was carrying the bag home." Where was her freedom of choice?

When one is driven by political correctness or globally-acceptable truth, one has a hard time looking past the "allowable" thought patterns to ask obvious questions. Are plastic bottles really a threat to landfills? Is there another way to dispose of plastic other than throwing it in landfills? Is there any other reason landfills are filling up, and is there a solution? There are answers to these questions, but they will surely make the greens choke on their tofu as they read them.

The fact is, according to a 2010 report by Angela Logomasini of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, plastic bottles are not filling up landfills. They represent less than one percent of landfill waste. She goes on to agree that they don't degrade, "but nothing does."

In addition, we have an artificial shortage of landfills because environmental regulations prevent new ones. We have no lack of land in America and could open numerous new landfills to meet growing needs. Angela Logomasini agrees that we have plenty of landfill space and adds, "one large landfill 44 miles by 44 miles could manage 1,000 years of our waste. Simple enough, but completely politically in-correct in today's attack on logic. It's much more acceptable to regulate and ban valuable products. That has become the American way.

Those old landfills, once full, could be used for other uses. By researching the subject I found a list of 10 former landfills around the nation that were converted to parks, golf courses, playgrounds, soccer fields, and shopping centers. One in Virginia Beach, VA, was converted into a full-blown city

park called Mount Trashmore. We're supposed to envision landfills as a no man's land of devastation and waste forevermore (hence the need to block the creation of new ones). But, again, it's not true.

Finally, there are at least two possible scientific solutions to the disposal of plastic – first, heat. Plastic products are produced and shaped through the use of heat. It melts at a very low temperature. Instead of throwing massive amounts of money into propaganda to destroy the plastics industry, those concerned over the disposing of plastic could develop and purchase heat-generating machines (without smokestacks) and place them at every landfill. Then, melt the plastic into reusable liquid. Well, perhaps that's not as much fun as bullying us with anti-plastic police forces.

In 2020, scientists working at the University of Portsmouth developed an even better solution. According to their findings, Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) is the most common thermoplastic, used to make single-use drink bottles, clothing, and carpets. Usually, PET takes hundreds of years to break down in the environment, the leading attack against plastic. However, scientists have re-engineered a plastic-eating enzyme called PETase into an enzyme cocktail. Incredibly, this new PETase process can shorten those hundreds of years of plastic breakdown into a matter of days. That will revolutionize plastic recycling and eliminate the environmental danger.

However, as many now understand, little in these attacks against industrial revolution products have anything to do with science or truth. The roots of the environmental movement's agenda lay in the determination to destroy free markets. The use of fear of ecological Armageddon creates political power and massive funding for them. So, actually solving the problem means losing the power and the money. That's why no headlines have promoted solutions beyond banning the products.

Instead, there is now a steady march by the stores, which have always provided the bags (whether paper or plastic) for free, to embrace government regulations that will ban the bags. Providing those bags for free to every customer is a considerable cost for the store. Now, however, with the government's new tax, in the name of environmental protection, they are succeeding in getting consumers to purchase their own "reusable" bags which the store now sells to you for a profit. It's a new profit center built on environmental guilt. "Conscious Capitalism," indeed. Partnerships between government and private corporations, for the sake of political power, is more accurately called fascism, and truth and liberty always lose in that game.

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