



Plastic Pollution

Description

What is Plastic pollution:

- Plastic pollution is the accumulation of plastic on earth which is negatively impacting the environment and living beings. Plastic is non-biodegradable and takes approx 500 to 1000 years to completely degrade.

The intensity of the situation:

- We are inhaling and literally eating plastic. A lot of plastic wastage is dividing into smaller particles and are mixing in air and inland. And hence we are inhaling the plastic particles and eating the plants that absorbed plastic from the land.

Causes of Plastic pollution:

- Usage of plastic products in increased multifold, and hence the production of plastic is rapidly increased.
- There are no cheap alternatives to plastic bags and other plastic products. Plastic is very inexpensive, and hence is being used by almost everyone.
- There is no proper awareness among the public about the ill-effects of plastic usage.
- Though there are bans on plastic bags, the alternatives are not encouraged enough.
- There is no responsibility assigned to manufacturers of plastic products and hence the production of plastic is still high. Many things such as food items, cosmetic products are all wrapped in plastic because once the products are sold, there is no responsibility of the plastic wastage on manufacturers.
- Only 21% of the plastic is recycled (till 2017) and all the remaining plastic garbage is polluting air, land and oceans. Recyclable plastic items are also thrown into the garbage and are not being recycled.
- Single-use plastic items constitute half of the plastic pollution.

Effects of Plastic pollution:

- Plastic garbage is causing land, air and water pollution.
- Discarded plastic items are dividing into small particles and we are inhaling those particles. When the plastic is burned along with other garbage, it releases poisonous chemicals into air which causes severe health problems.
- Most of the plastic waste is mixing in oceans, posing severe problems for marine life. A lot of ocean animals are dying by eating plastic waste. Fishes are eating polystyrene (small plastic particles). When we eat these ocean fishes, we are indirectly eating plastic.
- Plastic waste is polluting land and groundwater as well. Plants are absorbing small plastic particles. Plastic waste is preventing rainwater from seeping into the ground. These products clog drains as well. Bangladesh witnessed worse floods due to plastic waste and hence imposed ban on plastic.
- Many animals are dying by eating plastic covers.
- These days everything including food is wrapped in plastic. When these products are exposed to heat, it releases dangerous chemicals such as BPA (bisphenol-a) into food. The same goes for plastic bottles as well. This causes severe health problems when consumed.
- Polyvinyl chloride & polycarbonates that are present in plastic waste causes skin diseases, cancers etc.

Steps taken in India:

- In India, the ban on plastic is different in different states. Recently Mumbai, the biggest plastic waste generator banned the sale, import and usage of single-use plastic.
- Plastic covers below 50 microns are banned in India because thinner bags pose a major threat to the environment and are not recyclable.
- Single-use plastic is banned in 18 states of India. The Indian government has set a target to eliminate single-use plastics by 2022.
- Almost all states started charging for plastic covers. But this move is ineffective because plastic covers cost just 2 or 3 rs. and everyone is ready to buy them.
- Plastic ban in Sikkim is very effective when compared with all other states of India.

Best Practices worldwide:

- Rwanda banned plastic since 2008 and is likely to become the first plastic-free country in the world. The plastic ban in Rwanda is effective because the punishments of selling and using plastic are severe. People are fined, jailed and even forced to make public confessions if they use plastic.
- Approx 40 countries like India, England, China, Australia etc imposed partial bans and heavy taxes on plastic.
- Sweden is the best country in effectively recycling almost everything including plastic.
- In Ireland, plastic bags are made very expensive. This step worked well and the usage of plastic bags reduced drastically.

What needs to be done:

- Alternatives to plastic bags and covers should be encouraged by subsidies etc.
- Awareness programs on ill-effects of plastic should be conducted on a war-footing.
- Plastic waste should be effectively recycled by constructing roads and houses etc. with plastic waste.
- We should target the production stage. Supply of plastic items is too high. Manufacturers should be made liable for the waste.
- Imposing responsibility and heavy fines to manufacturers will force them to look for alternatives to pack their goods, for example, some soaps are now being packed in paper materials instead of plastic.
- At an individual level, we should reduce plastic usage as much as possible. For example, carrying cloth bags to the market, using steel water bottles can be our first step to transform our lives into plastic-free.

Conclusion:

Along with implementing bans on plastic goods, alternative eco-friendly materials should be encouraged. People should feel responsible for the plastic waste they are throwing. To make everyone feel responsible, extensive awareness programs are needed. Eliminating the need for plastic goods and recycling & upcycling of the plastic waste will save earth from plastic pollution.

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