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Understanding Canada's ban on single-use plastics

And what that could mean for the rest of North America

The HC Companies – May 2020

Purpose:

This whitepaper intends to help educate readers about the proposed restrictions towards single-use plastics in Canada and how that could eventually make its way into the U.S.

Though there have been rumblings of the growing demand for bans on single-use plastics throughout the world, Canada's proposed restrictions offer the first example of nationwide legislation in North America. So, what does that mean for the United States in the future, if anything?

To answer that, we must first take a closer look at how the proposed legislation in Canada originated, where it's focused and how other countries have handled similar restrictions. Then, we'll explore the impact of single-use plastics on many key aspects of our day-to-day lives before digging into what the future for the United States might look like, and how we can adapt to make the most of a potentially single-use plasticless future.

Canada's Ban on Single-Use Plastics

Prime Minister Trudeau was quick to state that the proposed restrictions in Canada come from a growing need and demand for the country to do its part. However, it's also worth noting that, [National Geographic](#), the country boasts the longest coastline in the world, and the country is home to a quarter of the world's fresh water supply. The entirety of the restriction details have yet to be laid out. Still, Trudeau said in a news conference that the ban on single-use plastics is only one of the things his government will be doing to lessen plastic pollution in the country.

With over 60 nations having taken steps over the past decade to reduce the use of single-use plastics through some form of legislation, Canada joins an ever-expanding list of global communities dedicated to fighting the negative impact of these disposables on our environment.

However, proposing such restrictions is only one part of the equation. Shifting public opinion and altering consumer behavior is another vital piece of the puzzle when it comes to enforcing limits, bans and taxes applied to single-use plastics. To effectively make this shift, Canada will need to have a



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thorough understanding of how its citizens already relate to and utilize single-use plastics and disposables in their daily lives.

The implications of a ban such as the one Trudeau is proposing reach every corner of society. From your regular grocery shopping trips, to the products you order from online stores, to the restaurants and bars you visit for social gatherings. Most aspects of our lives have been made more convenient by the addition of easy-to-access, affordable and quick-to-clean-up single-use plastics. Furthermore, alternatives need to be considered. It isn't enough to wage war on plastic straws or any other disposable plastic without considering how all these things are being utilized for quality of life among various communities.

A ban on single-use plastics, then, asks for more than just wiping them out of our daily lives and taking the convenience of their existence along with them. It asks that those who propose and implement these restrictions and bans also have resources devoted to finding alternative and more sustainable solutions for those conveniences.

Shifting that landscape and influencing that behavior will be a challenging but worthwhile endeavor.

Of course, Canada isn't the first country to take this plunge. As we mentioned, [National Geographic](#) notes that over 60 nations have imposed and started to enforce bans, restrictions and taxes on single-use plastics to reduce pollution and change the game for our environment as well as the sustainability of our daily lives. Peru, the European Union, India and China have all committed to similar legislation and enforcement.

China, in particular, made a massive impact when it stopped buying plastic waste from the rest of the world. The ripples of that decision are still being felt across many of the countries that decision impacted as they work to find better and more sustainable solutions for their plastic waste. And as recent studies [by the EPA](#) have shown that only 9% of the world's produced plastic is recycled correctly, it's clear that the need for more sustainable solutions is reaching a tipping point.

For Canada's part, the first North American country to take these steps toward reducing plastic pollution, the specific items included in the ban have not yet been specified. However, Trudeau noted in his news conference that "likely candidates" include plastic bags, straws, cutlery, plates and stir sticks. He and his government will work closely with provinces and territories to introduce the new standards and set targets to reduce plastic production and create systems that make manufacturers and retailers more responsible for their plastic waste.



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He said he feels confident that the ambitious goals he's setting for these restrictions can be met country-wide by the proposed date of 2021. Ambitious as the goals may be, legislation like this is made increasingly more possible and easier by the fact that more sustainable alternatives do exist and are being made more readily available at scale with increasing frequency.

Why Single-Use Plastics Are Bad

You've seen the stories, scrolled past the posts on your social media feeds, heard the facts. Single-use plastics are polluting our oceans and waterways to disastrous ends, but there are many more reasons they are harmful beyond the heartbreaking photos of tortoises with straws stuck in their nostrils.

The environmental impact can't be ignored. [According to Business Insider](#), by 2050 it's estimated that, by weight, the ocean will contain more plastic than fish. And yes, that weight includes whales, orcas and all manner of massive, deep-sea life. If that seems incomprehensible, we get it. But whether or not we can wrap our heads around it, that's the reality we're looking at if we don't make changes on a large, global scale as well as on an individual, local level. How single-use plastic pollution impacts our environment goes well beyond what meets the eye, however.

While the scenes of plastic bags clogging up urban waterways and tangled around dolphin fins certainly tug at the heartstrings, they only scratch the surface of what plastic pollution is doing to our planet. With 51 trillion microplastic particles (500 times the number of stars in our galaxy) found in the ocean, [a number cited by the United Nations](#), the potential for serious harm is tremendous. Microplastics may start in the sea, but they can quickly spread to other parts of the environment and bring with them a host of health problems that damage the nervous systems, lungs and reproductive organs of not just countless animal species, but humans as well, [according to Nature's Path](#).

When we look beyond the environmental implications, the impact of single-use plastics doesn't stop. From a social perspective, the readiness, low production costs and seemingly limitless availability have created a society that values convenience over sustainability. This has created an imbalance where small businesses that are trying to do their part by choosing more sustainable and/or environmentally friendly business practices may face job loss or severe loss in revenue because of a perceived lack of convenience.

Single-use plastics have made us complacent in several areas. We reach for what's easiest rather than looking beyond. The solution "exists," even if it's harmful to our communities, our cities, our planet. However, we believe that we're at the beginning of a shift. Innovation is needed now more than ever;



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sustainable business practices must be lauded now more than ever. We must do our part individually, so the demand for better choices, better routines, a better world is greater.

If we can accomplish this, we stand to gain so much more than we think we might be losing. As we've alluded to, much of the social impact we've allowed these products to have comes down to perception. In reality, over time, switching to reusable and sustainable packaging saves billions of dollars. A recent study reported by [Marketplace.org](#) found that 95% of plastic packaging's material value (\$80-120 billion annually) is lost to the economy, a fact that's only made worse by the fact that 90.5% of all plastic produced has never been recycled.

In the state of California alone, \$25 million is spent each year to dispose of plastic waste in landfills. When you boil it down, we're spending tens of billions of dollars annually to actively harm the environment without any net positive effect on the economy or our daily lives. Clearly, it's time for a change.

Will the U.S. Adopt a Single-Use Plastic Ban?

In short, the answer to the question of whether or not the U.S. will ever adopt a single-use plastics ban similar to the one Canada is implementing, and many other countries have implemented is – yes. At least from the perspective of whether or not we could. However, it's not enough to know that it's possible. We have to consider what it would mean.

At The HC Companies, we've been a leading voice in the horticultural industry, and we are always learning, growing and innovating to provide the best solutions for our growers and customers no matter what the legislative landscape brings. One of our core commitments as a company is service, and part of that is a responsibility to the environment.

As part of that responsibility we strive to be [environmentally conscious](#) in all aspects of our business. We've accomplished this in a number of ways, including sourcing resin for our products that is comprised of post-consumer, post-industrial recycled material. This allows us to pass on the benefits of reduced solid waste sent to landfills, conservation of resources necessary to create containers from non-recycled materials, energy savings and an overall reduced carbon footprint onto you.

Currently, single-use plastics are the number one choice in most, if not all, growing operations across the country. They meet necessary standards for health, hygiene and cleanliness while allowing control over aspects of the growing operation where our customers need it. They've been reliable, effective, reasonably low-cost and easy to access. A single-use plastics ban would shift your entire growing



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operation. You would be forced to replace and re-work several steps in your existing workflow. You would have to, theoretically, vet alternative and more sustainable options to ensure that you retain the quality you depend on and are depended on for.

While that may seem like a frightening prospect, it's important to note that a nationwide ban of this type wouldn't happen overnight. In a country like the United States, there are some challenges to passing such legislation that other countries who have passed similar bans won't face. States and municipalities have some choice in whether to go along with or go against governmental decisions. Furthermore, just like the legislation in Canada, implementation would take strategy and time.

Even though the United States would need to approach a nationwide rollout of a single-use plastics ban differently, the rising need for some kind of change has led some states to make their own decisions already. Maryland, Maine, California, Washington D.C., the state of Washington and even Colorado already have current initiatives that align with the goals of Canada's proposed ban. Almost all of the states in the above list have drafted and passed this legislation in the last three years, indicating a growing trend that we only expect to see gain greater traction in the years to come.

Whether or not the United States takes nationwide action on this matter, we believe it's essential to be prepared for what may come, to do our part to help our planet and to make it easy for our customers to do the work they love.

Why Fiber?

That's why we've developed The HC Companies Sustainable Fiber Solutions offering. Fiber solutions comprised of recycled newspaper, provides a sustainable alternative for any number of problems that single-use plastics currently "solve." The versatility of fiber solutions is, essentially, unmatched. Paired with the belief that we, as a society, have a better understanding of the scientific properties of paper products and how it can easily be recycled at a reasonable cost, it's no surprise that sustainable fiber solutions are increasingly popular.

According to [Nielsen and Natural Marketing Institute](#) (NMI), 60% of Americans fall into the "Sustainable Mainstream" category, which means they want to be more sustainable, but they're also searching for added benefits to that decision. The process of recycling paper

as opposed to making it from new materials generated 74% less air pollution and uses 50% less water. It takes approximately only 60% of the energy needed to make paper from new materials.



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That impact is tangible in more ways than one. When something takes fewer resources to create, it becomes cheaper to produce, and those cost savings can get passed down to the consumer, to the business owner, to the grower.

Ready to learn more? Visit hc-sustainable.com to discover more about our fiber product solutions and to request samples.

For immediate questions, call us at 800-225-7712.

About The HC Companies

HC has led the way in the production of plastic and fiber horticultural containers since 1986. We currently serve the greenhouse, nursery, cannabis and consumer markets throughout North America, with a wide range of products to satisfy the demands of growers and retailers. Additionally, our Canadian facility produces sustainable fiber solutions for product packaging, consumer products and more. Our corporate office is located in Twinsburg, Ohio.



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