

Oregon votes to ban restaurants from offering plastic straws

May 31 2019, by Sarah Zimmerman



This July 17, 2018 file photo shows wrapped plastic straws at a bubble tea cafe in San Francisco. On Wednesday, the Oregon House of Representatives voted to prohibit restaurants from providing single-use plastic straws unless a customer asks. Drive-thrus could still offer straws, as could health care facilities. California previously passed limits on plastic straws. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File)

Oregon will ban restaurants from automatically offering single-use plastic straws under a measure passed by lawmakers, making it the second state to enact restrictions on plastic straws.

The House voted 48-12 late Wednesday night to prohibit restaurants from providing single-use [plastic](#) straws unless a customer asks. Drive-thrus could still offer straws, as could [health care facilities](#).

California previously passed limits on plastic straws.

Gov. Kate Brown told reporters Thursday the move is about raising public consciousness of plastic's effects on the environment and is meant to encourage more environmentally friendly lifestyle changes.

"Raising awareness to show the extent that we're so reliant on plastic is really important," she said.

On the floor, lawmakers discussed a widely shared 2015 video showing a sea turtle in distress as scientists remove a plastic [straw](#) stuck up its nose, which led to [public outcry](#) and moved cities and companies like Starbucks and Whole Foods to eliminate their use of plastic straws.

But the video, which has more than 35 million views on YouTube, didn't completely move House Republicans, who said that restricting straws makes little difference to the environment and will only cause bureaucratic headaches.

"There was no evidence provided that plastic straws used by Oregonians cause birds and turtles to have straws in them," said Rep. Werner Reschke, a Republican from Klamath Falls. "We've been banning all sorts of things that we don't do. It's not the right way."

Other Republicans said they were fine with the move, stressing it's not a

total ban on straws and that customers can still request them. They were also won over by the proposal's pre-emption clause, which prohibits cities from approving future straw bans that go further than state law. That provision fractured environmentalists and caused some groups to withdraw their support.

The World Economic Forum projects that there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050. Over 8 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean each year—though [plastic straws](#) make up less than 1% of ocean waste.

Although the Senate already approved the measure, the chamber must still approve a technical change before the bill hits the governor's desk.

The state is also weighing bans on single-use [plastic bags](#) and Styrofoam takeout containers, and those measures have received similar criticism for being inconvenient to consumers while not providing substantial benefits to the environment.

Brown said these measures aren't meant to be half-hearted attempts to simply make liberals "feel good" about addressing environmental issues. Instead, she said it's a first step to encouraging more comprehensive lifestyle changes.

"Every action makes a difference," she said. "When we start thinking of a path to a plastic-free life, it's really challenging and I think we all have to start moving to that mindset."

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