

Draft US law to make plastic industry responsible for recycling

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Carry your own cup to the coffee shop. Recycle that soda bottle. Say no to straws.

The growing global crisis of plastics waste is often framed as a problem stemming from careless consumers, but a new bill introduced in the US Congress Tuesday seeks to shift the responsibility back to industry.

The proposed "Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act," introduced by Democratic lawmakers, would be the most ambitious regulation the US plastics industry has ever seen.

It would require producers to collect and recycle their own waste, create a nationwide drink container refund scheme and phase out certain single-use [plastic items](#),

Permitting of new plastic production would be paused for up to three years under the proposal.

But it has little chance of passage in the Senate where a Republican majority opposes curbs on an industry that generates about \$400 billion in sales and a million manufacturing jobs.

Still, observers say it signals the growing sway of environmental groups on mainstream politics.

"The plastics industry has convinced everybody if you put your (recycling) bin out on the corner, you've done everything you can do," Democratic Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico, one of its co-sponsors, told AFP. "We needed the industry to change the whole model."



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For decades, the industry has sponsored initiatives to encourage consumers to leave their plastics out for recycling in blue bins.

Yet the United States recycles only around eight percent of its plastic waste each year, with the rest—some 32 million tons—landfilled, incinerated or shipped overseas to other countries that are poorly equipped to handle it.

The bill would require producers of certain plastic products to design, manage and finance programs that collect and process product

waste—normally the purview of state and [local governments](#).

Beginning in 2022, they would have to phase out many single-use items like carryout bags, and polystyrene containers.

It would also create a 10-cent national refund program for all beverage containers, schemes that have proved highly successful at the state level.

Alan Lowenthal, a congressman from California and the bill's co-sponsor, told reporters he was especially proud the bill would prevent plastic waste being exported to less developed countries where it ends up in landfills and waterways, harming human health and endangering wildlife.

But perhaps most ambitiously, it would place a hold on new plastic production, which the oil and gas industry sees as its next growth area as demand for fossil fuels tapers down.

Global plastic production is set to triple by 2050, accounting for 20 percent of global oil consumption, according to an estimate by the World Economic Forum.

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