

Plastic use in pandemic contributing to global waste problem, says expert

April 16 2020, by Avery Ruxer Franklin



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The global demand for certain plastics has grown during the coronavirus pandemic while recycling efforts have suffered setbacks, according to an environmental expert at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

Personal protective equipment, takeout food packaging and single-use water bottles have all seen a rise in demand as people combat the spread of COVID-19. Meanwhile, municipalities, airlines and other business concerned about exposing workers to the virus have suspended their collection and recycling programs, wrote Rachel Meidl, a fellow in energy and environment at the Baker Institute.

"The pandemic, coupled with the oil price collapse and a [global economic slowdown](#), challenges the world's stated desire for investments to keep pace with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the aspiration of a circular economy," Meidl wrote in a Baker Institute blog post that [was also published by Forbes](#).

"An additional consequence of the pandemic has been the repeal of statewide, municipal or corporate single-use plastic bans stimulated by the concerns for safety and cross-contamination of the virus," she wrote. "(It) underscores the ignorance society has on the unintended consequences of bans implemented without systematic and strategic assessments of plastic waste and their potential replacements."

Meidl argues that a systemic approach, not product-focused bans, is how to combat the extensive and interconnected global waste problem: "COVID-19 has not eliminated the need to propel the recycling industry to become more economical and sustainable."

Meidl, who joined the Baker Institute in 2018, is a former deputy associate administrator at the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. Prior to her role in [federal government](#), she was the director of regulatory and technical affairs at the American Chemistry Council, where she advanced a broad range of regulatory and policy issues involving enforcement, compliance, investigations and litigation.

Provided by Rice University

Citation: Plastic use in pandemic contributing to global waste problem, says expert (2020, April 16) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-04-plastic-pandemic-contributing-global-problem.html>

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