



Pass Legislation to Reduce Plastic Pollution

The Alliance for the Great Lakes urges Congress and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to:

- Congress should pass the Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act, REUSE Act, and Farewell to Foam Act to reduce pollution at the source.
 - Congress should urge the U.S. EPA to maintain strong protections from toxic pollution to protect human health and drinking water.
 - Congress should explore ways to hold plastic producers accountable, including by holding a hearing on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)
- progress in the United States as an update to the 2024 Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works hearings.
 - U.S. EPA should protect our drinking water by listing plastic as a chemical of mutual concern under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and establishing ongoing monitoring of the Great Lakes and drinking water for plastic contaminants.

Background: Plastic is polluting our water—in the Great Lakes and around the world. Plastic pollution is everywhere: on beaches, in rivers, in lakes, and even in treated drinking water. In the Great Lakes, the pollution starts during manufacturing and continues as single-use plastic items become trash. Toxins from plastics and associated chemicals threaten human health and ecosystems.

Alliance for the Great Lakes volunteers typically remove over half a million pieces of litter from Great Lakes shorelines each year, with 86% of those pieces, on average, composed of plastic. Researchers at the Rochester Institute of Technology estimate that 22 million pounds of plastic enter the Great Lakes annually—which is of serious concern given that the Great Lakes are a source of drinking water for 1 in 10 Americans. But today, we lack standard approaches to monitor plastic pollution, assess risks, and develop management frameworks.

While discarded plastic poses serious risks, significant environmental impacts also occur during plastic production. Plastic products are made from oil and gas, and contain chemical additives such as flame retardants, UV stabilizers,

and colorants added during manufacturing. Harmful chemicals are released at every stage of the plastic life cycle, including during production, transportation, use, and disposal.

Plastic in the Great Lakes ecosystem also has a significant impact on wildlife, which may ingest plastic pieces and become entangled in plastic items such as fishing line. Researchers have identified alarming levels of plastic in Great Lakes fish—among the highest reported worldwide. A University of Toronto study found that 90% of Great Lakes water samples taken from the last 10 years contain microplastic levels that are “unsafe for wildlife.”

Now is the time to take action with policies to protect our Great Lakes by reducing the worst plastic pollution at the source (including regulating plastic industrial pellets and foam food ware) and moving towards sustainable reuse policies, while also advancing comprehensive Great Lakes monitoring of plastic pollution and its impact on drinking water. Together we can protect our Great Lakes for generations to come.

