

Plastics Come of Age 1960s- Present



**Olivia Zydel, Fiona Stockdale, Wilkes Jordan, Nick
Bartholemew, Michael Duren**
Designer: Kalynda Culek
The College at Brockport, State University of New York

Keywords: Plastics, Recycling, Pollution, History, Drake Memorial Library

Abstract

Explaining the growth of the plastic industry and modern environmental movement.

Plastics Come of Age

1960s–Present

Design: Kalynda Culek

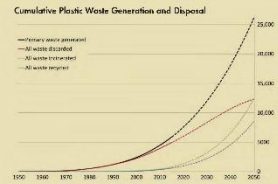
History: Olivia Zydell, Fiona Stockdale, Wilkes Jordan, Nick Bartholemew, Michael Duren



Growth of the Plastic Industry

Plastic production expanded dramatically in the 1960s as the low-cost material was more widely used in packaging and fueled growing production of nearly every category of consumer goods. Its resilient and noncorrosive properties made plastics ideal for such new applications as industrial piping and residential plumbing, surgical equipment and body implants, medical films to protect wounds, and filters to purify water and treat sewage. As plastics have come of age, the material is essential to agriculture and industry, construction and trade,

and human health and material prosperity. While production expanded dramatically after the 1960s, public attitudes about plastics began to shift. As the material became commonplace, many criticized plastics as cheap and artificial, a negative symbol of a materialistic society that had become as cheap, flimsy and fake as the plastics it obsessively consumed. People also worried that plastic trash was despoiling the environment, clogging waterways and oceans, and overwhelming landfills.



Modern Environment Movement

As the modern environmental movement erupted in the late 1960s, public demands for a litter-free environment led many municipalities to start plastic recycling programs in the 1970s and 80s. Environmental concerns about the harmful effect of pollution on ecosystems, wildlife, and people, placed plastics alongside other solid waste and chemical pollutants as threats to the planetary environment.

Public health officials further pointed to the dangers of plastics—babies choking on bottle tops and toy pieces; children suffocating

on plastic bags; and plastic factory workers suffering elevated rates of cancer. Public health concerns have multiplied as researchers found plastics in creatures throughout the food chain—including people—and have discovered that chemicals from those plastics are in food, air, and people's bloodstreams, where they disrupt human hormones that govern healthy metabolism, growth, and reproduction. Thus many epidemiologists suspect that chemicals used in a wide range of everyday plastic products may contribute to rising rates of infertility and cancer.

