

Should plastic packaging be banned?

Two important awareness days this week are encouraging people to tackle plastic pollution and to find alternatives to plastic packaging.

What you need to know

- The first synthetic plastic – known as celluloid – was developed in the 1860s.
- The theme for this year's World Environment Day, on 5 June, is Beat Plastic Pollution. World Oceans Day is on 8 June and encourages people to help prevent plastic pollution and find solutions to create a healthy ocean.
- Plastic pollution is the term used to describe the build-up of plastic products, such as packaging, in the environment to the extent that they are causing problems for wildlife and its habitats, and humans.



WOW!
On 27 May, 6,000 volunteers picked up more than 200 tonnes of rubbish on Versova beach on the west coast of India.

Plastic is a material that is both durable (meaning that it will last a long time) and versatile, in that it has thousands of uses, making it perfect for packaging. Since it can be melted and moulded into millions of different things, plastic has fundamentally changed the way people live. More recently, however, the dangers of plastic waste have been highlighted through television programmes such as the BBC's *Blue Planet II*. Every year, about eight million tonnes of plastic – including bottles, containers and bags – ends up in the oceans. By 2050, it is believed that there will be more plastic in the planet's waters than fish. So is the answer to ban plastic packaging altogether?

Yes – ditch plastic packaging

Marine life is at risk from the plastic packaging that pollutes the oceans because creatures often get tangled in it or eat it by mistake, both of which can be fatal. The majority of plastic is made from oil, which is a non-renewable resource (it is irreplaceable and will eventually run out), so why is it being used for things such as single-use plastic bottles and not being saved for vital items, such as medical supplies? Plastic takes a long time to break down, and remains on the planet for hundreds of years. What's more, there are plenty of environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic packaging. Plastic might be cheap and convenient, but it could end up costing us the Earth.

No – plastic makes life easier

Plastic is used to make a wide variety of items, such as packaging and containers, many of which make our lives easier. For example, plastic packaging keeps food fresher for longer; it helps reduce the amount of food waste that is created when food becomes inedible after being exposed to oxygen or moisture. Using plastic to protect products such as food or expensive pieces of technology helps prevent damage. Environmentally friendly options just aren't as effective; paper bags, for example, are liable to tear when they get wet. Besides, since plastic lasts for a long time, some of it can be reused, recycled and transformed into new products.

YES Three reasons why plastic packaging should be banned

- 1 Plastic is harmful to wildlife, including fish, mammals and seabirds.
- 2 Most plastic is made from non-renewable resources.
- 3 It remains with us for a long time – plastic bags, for example, are not truly degradable, meaning that tiny fragments continue to pollute the environment.

NO Three reasons why plastic packaging should not be banned

- 1 It helps store food hygienically, allowing it to remain fresher for longer and thus preventing food waste. It also helps protect delicate products.
- 2 Plastic lasts a long time and can be reused and recycled.
- 3 Alternatives to plastic packaging are not as effective.

THE WEEKLY POLL

To find out what everyone is voting on this week visit:
theweekjunior.co.uk/polls

YES

NO



What do you think?

Each week we ask our readers to vote in our The Big debate poll. You can find out what we're voting on at the moment by visiting theweekjunior.co.uk/polls.

The aim of the Big debate page is to present two sides of an issue fairly and objectively, in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on the page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties. The page is created in association with the English-Speaking Union, an educational charity helping young people discover their voice and realise their full potential. For more information, please see esu.org



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION
discovering voices