



CLEAN WATER IS UP TO YOU

By Carol Hillestad for the Brodhead Watershed Association

Make Smart Choices and Ditch Single-Use Plastic

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Plastic can be a menace.

Plastics don't decompose or "go away." They just fracture into smaller and smaller smithereens — small enough to slip through the blood-brain barrier in humans and other mammals, with effects that still are not understood.

Of the more than eight billion tons of plastic created since 1950, only nine percent was recycled. The rest of it is still loose in our world — and its effect is enough to make your hair stand on end.

Tiny microplastics have been found deep in the ocean, in Arctic snow and Antarctic ice, in shellfish, table salt, drinking water and beer, according to nature.com, as well as floating in the air and falling in rain — basically everywhere.

In the world's oceans, entanglement and starvation from filling their bellies with food-lookalike plastic kills an estimated 100,000 marine mammals annually.

Here at home, these plastics contaminate creeks and streams, groundwater, and wells. So-called "purified" water — bottled in plastic — has much more plastic contamination than tap water: People who drink mostly bottled water in place of tap water may be doubling their annual intake of these tiny particles.

On a macro level, in Monroe County in 2018, a truck accident dumped 27,000 pounds of plastic pellets into Sand Spring Run in the Brodhead watershed. Brodhead Watershed Association worked on a cleanup, but the pellets quickly flowed with the water three miles and more. So plenty of that pollution will be with us, well, forever.

Then again, plastic is also widely useful in modern life — in everything from prescription bottles to cars to building materials.

But single-use plastic? We can all do without that. Drinking straws, water bottles, shopping bags, plastic forks, styrofoam takeout boxes — we can make better choices for all of these things.

Tell the server "no straw, please," when you order a drink. Use your own refillable water bottle. Keep a reusable box in the car for restaurant leftovers. And the world is full of cloth and other multi-use shopping bags, often free for the asking.

Keeping plastic out of our freshwater creeks and streams protects drinking water, and helps keep plastic debris out of the Atlantic — and out of the guts of shore birds, sea turtles, whales, and other vulnerable creatures.

For more on freshwater plastic pollution, visit <https://www.cleanwateraction.org>



In 2018, tons of plastic pellets spilled from a tractor-trailer rollover on route 80, reaching Pocono Creek and beyond in the Brodhead watershed. Choosing alternatives to plastic shopping bags, straws, and other products helps keep microplastic pollution out of drinking water.

For humans, fish, and every living thing, Brodhead Watershed Association protects water quality and quantity throughout our area. Get involved! Become a member today. <https://www.brodheadwatershed.org>.