



## **EARTH DAY** **2024**

Earth Day, an annual event on April 22, supports our environment. Began in 1970 and has spread worldwide including 1 billion people in more than 193 countries. **The official theme for Earth Day 2024 is Planet vs Plastics.**

The Invention of plastic in 1907 was considered a major breakthrough. For many years, only benefits of plastics were seen and very little of damaging consequences for our health, natural ecosystem, and climate. Problems stem mainly from the un-biodegradable nature, materials used for production, hydrocarbons created from refining oil and natural gas, and the challenges with properly discarding plastics. Plastics are the most common littered item in the world.

Plastics affect our water and the sea creatures as humans throw plastics into the water. Emissions of pollutants into the air can result in changes to the climate. These pollutants, including greenhouse gases, are often referred to as climate forcers. After decades of producing trillions of oil-based plastic items, the negative consequences are startling. Plastic pollution is now recognized as a public health hazard. Microplastics are known to cause damage to human cells. Increase risk impairs brain and neurological functions, cancer, cardiovascular damage, diabetes to a long list of health issues. As many as one million people each year die as a result mismanaged waste, such as plastic, according to research by David Attenborough.

Many plastics contain the chemicals phthalates (DEHP) and bisphenol-A (BPA). Now recognized as a hazard to public health and the human body. If you consume foods and beverages in these plastics, they can be contaminated. If food is heated in these containers via microwave, chemicals can leach into the food.

Today let's focus on how we can minimize plastic pollution and help our health, environment, and climate. Be aware that plastics are very difficult to live without as plastic comes in bags, clothing made of nylon or polyester, storage containers, to construction materials, furniture, cars, appliances, electronics, and countless other items. Plastics are everywhere- just look in your refrigerator!

It is time to Reduce, Refuse, Reuse, Recycle and Remove plastics>.

**Reduce:** the number of plastics you use. Ask yourself: Do I need it? Can I use something else? Use a reusable straw instead of a plastic straw, purchase cotton clothing to metal silverware on a picnic.

**Refuse:** a straw at a restaurant, use reusable bags, use mesh bags for fruits and vegetables, wool drier balls instead of drier sheets, and avoid products excessively wrapped in plastic are a few suggestions.

**Reuse:** Avoid single use disposable plastic items. Use reusable water bottles, canvas shopping bags, reusable food storage containers- preferably not plastic. Donate old clothes, toys, and furniture, use dishes, glasses, and metal silverware instead of plastic.

**Remove:** Cleaning up our neighborhoods and community of discarded plastics and properly disposing of them.

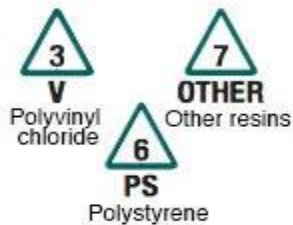
**Recycle:** Reminder of what should be recycled.

## YES, RECYCLE:



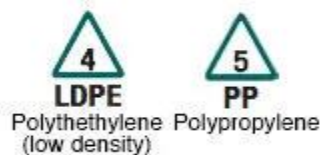
*These codes can be found on soda bottles, water bottles, cleaning products, milk and juice jugs, shampoo bottles, some retail bags.*

## NO, THROW AWAY:



*These codes can be found on plastic wraps, cooking oil containers, PVC containers, vinyl and styrofoam products.*

## MAYBE:



*Since few recycling centers process these plastics, call the center and ask if they accept these plastics.*

Written by Laurie Zirilli, MA RD CDN, contract RD for Oneida County Office for the Aging (OFA). OFA provides nutrition counseling and education for seniors. Questions about services and programs for older adults and caregivers, including Senior Nutrition Program, call Oneida County Office for the Aging at 315-798-5456.

### Reference:

<https://www.earthday.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2022-Plastic-Pollution-Primer-and-Action-Toolkit.pdf>