

Eugene Friends Meeting Minute on Reducing Plastics in the World

Approved - January 22, 2023

Eugene Friends Meeting acknowledges that plastic waste in the Earth's environment adversely affects wildlife, wildlife habitat, and humans, and that reducing plastic production, consumption, and waste is crucial if we are to overcome the problem of plastic pollution on our planet. Reducing the production and use of plastics in the world is a matter of integrity, stewardship and justice. While recognizing the struggle it will take, we agree to educate ourselves, witness, and take action, as led, with efforts in these directions:

1. **Reduce, re-use, and recycle our personal and Meeting House plastics:** We will encourage and educate each other to reduce our purchase of new plastics, re-use what we purchase when possible, and recycle with integrity, and only as a last option.
2. **Advocate for reducing plastic production and use,** especially of single-use plastics, by other organizations and businesses.
3. **Advocate for legislation** to reduce production of plastics, locally and nationally.
4. **Work to capture plastic waste in the environment** (from ground litter, stormwater, or with river or beach cleanups) and
5. **Advocate for improving waste management.**

Background:

Since the late 20th century, humans worldwide have depended on plastic as an affordable, versatile and durable material. Today, over 90% of the plastic we produce is not recycled. Recycling processes and infrastructure, in the US and worldwide, are grossly insufficient to manage the complexity and quantity of plastic waste produced, and so a large portion of plastic waste is disposed of in landfills or the natural environment.

Plastic is slow to degrade. Plastic waste can persist in the environment for centuries. The same properties that make plastics so useful — their durability and resistance to degradation — also make them nearly impossible for nature to completely break down.

Plastic waste in the Earth's environment adversely affects wildlife, wildlife habitat, and humans. In less developed countries, the majority of plastic waste eventually ends up in the oceans, where it is eaten by marine animals, often causing malnutrition and death. Microplastics enter the human body through ingestion (it's in our salt, tap water, seafood, and sugar, for example) as well as from inhalation and absorption.

NPYM's Faith and Practice says: *"We grieve over what has been lost through humankind's continuing misuse of divine gifts, leading to extinction of species; pollution of earth, water, and air; and calamitous climate change. As Friends we are led to live in right relationship to creation, to protect the Earth and all its inhabitants, to educate ourselves, and to witness both personally and as a Quaker community."*

The Eugene Friends Earthcare Support Group has struggled with the question of plastics in our lives since we began to meet in 2021, and have come to the conclusion that, though our individual actions help us each to align with our testimonies, plastics are so destructive that only collective action can hope to stay the damage. Reducing the production and use of plastics in the world is a matter of integrity, stewardship and justice. It may seem like an overwhelming task, but with collaboration and corporate action this complex problem can be solved.

Advices and Queries:

For centuries, Quakers have used Advices and Queries to guide, to challenge, to inspire, and to discern how we are each led to act. They are offered “for the comfort and discomfort of Friends” while we seek our own ways forward, listening for the inner Light. These Advices and Queries offer signposts for each of us to discover where our own service lies, and to help us keep these issues in focus and to maintain the urgency of the need for each of us to respond.

Integrity calls us to act on the plastic crisis. We strive to make personal, corporate, and community changes in our plastic purchasing habits. We encourage each individual, and each Eugene Friends Meeting committee, to examine our plastic use, seek alternatives, and report successes to the Meeting. Consumerism is an insidious cultural disease, which will still affect us even when we are trying our best to live simply. We need to educate ourselves about the far-reaching spiritual and environmental consequences of our daily activities, and witness personally by being patterns and examples of environmentally sustainable lifestyles.

Do we take time to inform ourselves of the impacts of our lifestyle on the world as a whole? Are we willing to make lifestyle changes? Whatever form our responses take, are we led by an awareness of the sacred duty placed on every one of us to care for the Earth and all living things?

Are we willing and able to hold each other tenderly in the light, and to support members in our community to make changes? Are we able to listen to the experience of others, both positive and negative, in a caring way that seeks to uphold, help and encourage them in discerning their own way forward?

And we acknowledge that we can't solve the plastics problem solely with individual effort. We must also witness and work to change the policies of businesses, manufacturers and the government.

How does our meeting strive to speak truth to power within our local community? If pressure is brought upon us to lower our standard of integrity, are we prepared to resist it? Do we seek to make our insights known to those in power in government and global companies, both locally and nationally, through meetings, letter writing, on-line and other avenues?

Outreach Plan:

1. Release monthly suggestions for action via the announcements, and posted on the website.
2. Request and remind committee clerks to season queries and actions in committee.
3. Ask committees and individuals to report changes and successes back to the Peace and Justice Committee, which we will report to meeting for Business.
4. Schedule possible worship sharing or support meetings.
5. Organize work parties, and letter-writing campaigns.