



# From an Industrial Economy to a Livable Economy: Environmental and Climate Justice Issues

## Introduction

In our industrial material economy the life cycle of products (from production, through use, to disposal) impacts the well-being of people and the planet in ways which are typically hidden. Transparency on the life cycle of our plastic and single use products is vital as the lives and voices of communities impacted by our industrial economy are typically ignored. These include but are not limited to impacts on workers, fence line communities, environment, wildlife, community appearance, climate and more. Business as usual is no longer an option and we have to act and think differently. We believe that through the lens of plastic pollution and climate change we have the potential to lay the groundwork for a new livable economy that works for ALL people and future generations.

## Environmental and Climate Justice Concerns in our current Business as Usual Scenario:

- According to the Fourth National Climate Assessment report low-income communities already have higher rates of many health conditions, are more exposed to environmental hazards and take longer to bounce back from natural disasters.<sup>i</sup> These existing inequalities will only be exacerbated due to climate change.<sup>ii</sup>
- In 2017, conflicts and climate disasters put 124 million people in 51 countries up against crisis levels of hunger. According to the Global Report on Food Crises, climate disasters triggered food crises across 23 countries — mostly in Africa — with shocks such as drought leaving more than 39 million people in need of urgent assistance.<sup>iii</sup>
- Mossville, LA and Port Arthur, TX are majority communities of color recognized as some of most polluted communities in the country. Mossville is in cancer alley, so called because it is where the plastic facilities/petroleum facilities are located and where the community bears the brunt of plastic production policies.<sup>iv</sup>
- Race – even more than class – is currently the number one indicator for the placement of toxic facilities in this country.<sup>v</sup>
- A study conducted by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) scientists found that minority and poorer communities are disproportionately affected by pollution relative to the overall population.<sup>vi</sup>
- Solid waste facilities present numerous public health concerns. Studies show that solid waste facilities are disproportionately located in communities of color and low wealth. Within the Twin Ports, a map makes clear that our landfills, waste transfers and associated noise, truck traffic, and accidental debris are similarly situated in low-income neighborhoods. The continued need for new facilities could exacerbate this environmental injustice.<sup>vii</sup>
- In New York City 75 percent of the city's entire solid waste stream is now processed in a handful of low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in the outer boroughs and bear the disproportionate burden of high truck traffic, diesel fuel emissions, unsanitary conditions, and noise pollution.<sup>viii</sup> "A lot of the waste ends up in our communities," says Elizabeth Yeampierre, executive director of UPROSE, an environmental and social justice-oriented community organization in Brooklyn.<sup>ix</sup>
- Duluthians of all income already pay for the impact of climate change and waste cleanup. As citizens we fund the majority of recycling education through our taxes.<sup>x</sup> The WLSSD spends more than \$600,000 per year on waste education and waste reduction while the City of Duluth Volunteer Coordinator coordinates beach clean-

ups and while the Storm Water Task Force supports Bag it Duluth in part because of the cost to clean storm water infrastructure.<sup>xi</sup>

- The proposed single use carry-out fee can be avoided through the use of reusable bags.

## Additional Reading

### Opinion Piece: Free Shopping Bags Have Already Cost the Poor Too Much

<https://www.citylab.com/solutions/2016/05/why-new-yorks-underserved-communities-deserve-a-plastic-bag-fee/481554/>

**Van Jones Statement: Plastic is a Social Justice Issue** <https://myplasticfreelife.com/2010/11/plastic-is-a-social-justice-issue-van-jones-at-tedxgp2/>

**Mary Robinson Foundation Principles of Climate Justice** <https://www.mrfcj.org/principles-of-climate-justice/>

## Additional Concerns <sup>xii</sup>

- According to the recent National Climate Assessment and IPCC reports we are in a climate emergency have twelve or so years to stem catastrophic climate change.
- A greater than 50% reduction in bag related global warming emissions could be achieved through a switch from single use bags to reusable carryout bags.
- The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, recently reported that the International Energy Agency found that direct greenhouse gas emissions from petrochemicals would increase 30 percent by 2050, the main driver, plastics.
- Plastics emit the potent greenhouse gases methane and ethylene, when they are exposed to sunlight and degrade.
- Over 20 million pounds of plastics enter the Great Lakes annually.
- Plastic fragments are now found in the waters of St. Louis River and off Park Point negatively impacting fish and fishing livelihoods.
- An average Duluth grocery store gives out approximately 1.5 million single use carry out bags per year.
- Our demand for free single use bags carry out bags costs an average grocery store about \$60,000 per year.
- Duluthians use approximately \$550k to \$2 million dollars' worth of single use grocery bags annually the majority of which are disposed in landfill.
- Plastic straws are the largest contaminant in the WLSSD compost facility
- Americans use 1.6 straws per person a day — most of them ending up in our waterways.
- Straws are one of the top ten marine debris items.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/26/climate-change-will-hurt-poor-people-the-most-federal-report.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/26/climate-change-will-hurt-poor-people-the-most-federal-report.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.mercycorps.org/articles/climate-change-affects-poverty>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.iccr.org/sites/default/files/2013MossvilleCancerCapitol.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.naacp.org/issues/environmental-justice/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/375289-epa-scientists-find-emissions-greater-impact-low-income-communities>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1964896/>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/6316-the-high-cost-of-the-free-plastic-bag>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://grist.org/climate-energy/are-plastic-bag-bans-good-for-the-climate/>

<sup>x</sup> <https://nextcity.org/features/view/cost-of-recycling-america-extended-producer-responsibility-cities>

<sup>xi</sup> <http://wlssd.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/WLSSD-SWMP-2013-.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> References at [www.bagitduluth.org](http://www.bagitduluth.org)