

## It's time to ditch plastic straws!

### Plastic straws are everywhere

Americans use over 500 million single-use straws every day, or about 1.5 straws per person. If Prince George's County residents are using the same number of straws as the average American, we are using and disposing of 1.36 million straws per day and 496 million straws per year! Most of these are



single-use plastic straws. They are not recyclable. They get tossed in the trash or left as litter in our beaches, streets, parks, and waterways. They stay in the environment for centuries or more.

### Plastic straws pollute our waterways and harm wildlife

Littered plastic straws wash into our streams, the Chesapeake Bay, and ultimately the ocean. Plastic straws are the seventh most-commonly collected item in beach clean-ups; single-use plastics of all types make up nine of the top ten items collected.

Plastic straws do not decompose in the natural environment, but break into ever smaller



pieces, polluting the water, and harming hundreds of species of marine birds and fish, often with fatal results. They end up entering the food chain. Whole straws can choke wildlife if ingested. The sea turtle in this photo was discovered with a plastic straw embedded in its nostril that scientists removed.

## **We don't need plastic straws!**

For most people, most of the time, beverages can be consumed without any straw at all. If a straw is needed, there are alternatives to single-use plastic straws -- paper straws and reusable straws made of stainless steel, silicone, glass, and bamboo.



## **Prince George's County's plastic straw ban**

In 2019, Prince George's County banned single-use straws and stirrers that are not home-compostable. Specifically, the law:

- Prohibits food service businesses from selling, distributing, or otherwise providing a straw or stirrer with food or beverage unless it is home-compostable.
- Prohibits retailers from selling, distributing, or providing a straw or stirrer to customers unless it also has available for sale straws or stirrers that are home-compostable.

*Plastic straws – whether made from petroleum- or biologically-based polymers – will not compost in the natural environment or in a home compost bin.*<sup>1</sup> Food service businesses may keep a limited stock of plastic straws to accommodate a customer's physical or medical needs. The law went into effect on July 1, 2020 and will be enforced from January 1, 2021. For more information, contact the Department of Environment, Recycling Section Inspection Unit at 301-883-3635.

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<sup>1</sup> Plastic straws made of PLA (polylactic acid), or #7 plastic, are not home-compostable. They can only be composted in an industrial composting facility. In the natural environment, they break up in much the same fashion as other plastic straws.