

Reducing your Plastic foot-print at Burning Man



The prevailing spirit of the Burning Man is “**radical self-reliance**” and “**leave no trace**”. With an anticipated attendance of 68,000 this year, many of you are feeling the excitement, the crunch around planning and preparation. This is usually when the most “rushed” plastic purchases happen. The most important concept is to “**pre-cycle**” meaning reduce the amount of disposable products and packaging that you bring in the first place so you’ve not just packing it out of the playa and dumping it somewhere else. Recycling is not the best solution for source reduction because it mostly gets shipped China and is very polluting overseas. The less you take, the less you have to bring back and clean. Start with something easy like promising to bring your mug to Center Café.

Three main areas are the greatest contributors to plastic pollution:

- **Water Storage**
- **Food**
- **Costuming and Gifts**

The **Plastic Pollution Coalition** is a global alliance of people, organizations, and business worldwide, working to eliminate plastic pollution. We have compiled some stats and suggestions to help minimize the “**plastic**” trace on the playa.

Around the world only 2-8% of plastic waste is actually recycled. Often, Burning Man recycling ends up at a waste management facility in Reno. Keep in mind, that even though you may not be leaving a trace on the playa, you will be leaving a trace elsewhere on the planet. Plastic is a material that never goes away. Every bit of plastic ever made is still with us on this planet. The items you bring to Burning Man will stay behind you for the generations to come, even if you collect them for recycling. Even though we will turn to dust, the plastic will not.

POTENTIAL TOTAL PLASTIC POLLUTION IMPACT for 2013 Burning Man, est. 68,000 attendees

Plastic Item	Estimated Total
1 gallon bottles	503,200
8 oz. plastic bottles (water, electrolytes, soda, juice)	1,480,000
plastic utensils	2,955,600
plastic plates	879,600
plastic cups	1,480,000
straws	503,200
bowls	305,000
5 gallon bottles (showering and dishes)	816,000
20 gallon drums	16,380

The chart above is a conservative estimation of potential plastic pollution that may be created during **2013's Burning Man**, unless we rally in these final preparation days, and focus on informed choices. For many burners, old and new, keeping costs down is an important aspect of being able to make it out to the "Dust Rave", so several of the suggestions below are affordable options. Granted, some of the items may seem pricey, but please consider the long-term impact to health and to the planet.

Radical self-reliance means that you have the power to impact our planet with your purchasing choices over the next few weeks.

These helpful suggestions were a combined effort by **Beth Terry** from www.myplasticfreelife.com, **Karima Cherif**, plastic free event coordinator for the **Plastic Pollution Coalition** <http://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org>, and **Earth Guardians** www.earthguardians.net.

We will also be on the **BMIR** radio at **11 am on Friday, August, 30th, 2013**.

You can also attend workshops at Earth Guardians with **Beth Terry**.

Workshops and Events at Earth Guardians:

http://www.earthguardians.net/volunteer_events.htm

Plastic Free Burning Man Workshops:

August 28th, 2013 1:00pm-2:00pm

August 31st, 2012 2:00-3:00pm

19 Plastic-Free Playa Tips:

1) Bring water in stainless steel containers. As you can see in the post, we used stainless steel iced tea containers last year because they were less expensive than double-walled alternatives. But for people who go to Burning Man regularly, you might want to invest in something like this:

Here are a myriad of choices. <http://www.thefind.com/kitchen/info-vintage-metal-cooler>
<http://www.ebay.com/itm/Super-Chef-10-Gallon-Thermal-Stainless-Beverage-Dispenser-/111081608564>

Often people fill their containers in Gerlach so they didn't have to transport heavy water the entire way from the Bay Area. Keep any plastic that contains water in the shade, as the sunlight expedites the chemicals leaching into your water like Phthalates and Bisphenol A.

When setting up your camp kitchen or bar, request that everyone BYO Cup, Plate, and reusable utensils. Avoid stir sticks and straws, unless you can get bamboo stir sticks, and paper straws. www.sustyparty.com

2) Buy food from bulk bins in your own containers. We bought all kinds of dried soups, hummus, beans, nuts, dried fruit, etc. from the bulk bins at Berkeley Bowl and Whole Foods. You can use jars, cloth bags, and stainless steel containers to avoid all forms of plastic packaging.

3) Borrow or buy things secondhand instead of buying new. You can put an ad on Freecycle or Yerdle to get flashlights and goggles. Unless you go to Burning Man every year or camp a lot, there might be quite a few things that you don't actually need to own.

4) Bring stainless steel water bottles / travel mug to carry with you at all time so you never have to take disposables. You can get them at second hand stores, or time permitting www.plasticantidote.com.

5) Also... carry reusable utensils and food container at all times since wherever you go on the playa, someone seems to always be offering food. Bamboo utensil set (although a good spork would take up even less space in your day bag) and a stainless steel Lunchbot container. www.plasticantidote.com or <http://www.lifewithoutplastic.com>

6) Bring plastic-free sunscreen. Here is my review of the two sunscreens I used on the playa -- Avasol and Balm! Baby. And also other methods for keeping the sun off without resorting to toxic chemical sunscreens in plastic bottles: <http://myplasticfreelife.com/2012/09/plastic-free-sunscreen-that-passes-the-burning-man-test/>

7) Make your own "wet wipes". http://www.diynatural.com/homemade-wipes/?awt_l=OqIMQ&awt_m=3dIFwqNDeTtFQkt
If you do decide to go with wet wipes, get the flexible exteriors instead of the hard plastic boxes.

8) You can acquire discounted non-plastic food storage containers at restaurant supply places, army surplus, or <http://www.lifewithoutplastic.com>

9) Speaking of vinyl, avoid it. It is PVC, one of the most toxic plastics, containing hormone-disrupting phthalates and producing dioxin when manufactured and burned. It off-gases terribly, especially in the heat. Don't make costumes out of it. Try to avoid it in tents and other equipment if you can.

10) Consider a vintage canvas and wood camping cot. Available on eBay. No plastic, and secondhand. Here's my blog post about it: <http://myplasticfreelife.com/2012/09/night-at-the-aquarium-on-a-plastic-free-camping-cot/>

11) If your camp is going to be providing food to the public, reduce waste by FIRST encouraging people to use their own reusable cups/containers (Ask, "Do you have your mug? Do you have your plate?" Or whatever.) Then, instead of bringing disposable plastic cups or even cups and plates that are paper coated with plastic, look into certified **non-G.M.O.** compostable alternatives. Here is one site providing some better options: <http://www.sustyparty.com/>

12) Use lip balm that comes in a compostable cardboard tube instead of plastic. The original brand to do this was Organic Essence. There are also some Etsy sellers now selling lip balm in the same compostable tubes. <http://myplasticfreelife.com/2009/12/plastic-free-organic-essence-lip-balm-body-cream-give-away/>

13) Toothpaste: There are plastic-free options: <http://myplasticfreelife.com/2011/08/searching-for-the-perfect-all-natural-plastic-free-toothpaste-or-powder-or-soap-or/> Lush Toothy Tabs in a cardboard box. EcoDent is a quality floss that comes in a sturdy cardboard box available in most health food stores like Whole Foods, and here <http://plasticantidote.com/ecodent-gentle-floss>

14) Toothbrush -- bring a bamboo one. My favorite brand is Brush with Bamboo, although the bristles are Nylon. <http://www.brushwithbamboo.com/>

15) Skip the disposable plastic glow sticks.

16) Ice -- instead of ice in plastic bags -- you can fill up metal containers with water and freeze for ice chest.

17) Compost -- explain how to collect their compostables and hanging compost to dry reduces the weight of your compost. There's not compost collection at Burning Man.

18) Avoid bringing plastic bags to the playa because they blow away too easily. Includes plastic grocery bags and plastic trash bags.

19) Most important concept is to "pre-cycle" meaning reduce the amount of disposable products and packaging that you bring in the first place so you've not just packing it out of the playa and dumping it somewhere else. Recycling is not the best solution for plastic waste because it mostly gets shipped to China and is very polluting overseas. Do you want to include this kind of information on the website? Here is a blog post I wrote several years ago and updated recently listing all the problems with plastic: <http://myplasticfreelife.com/2007/07/plastic-is-made-from-oil-you-knew-that/> Get a cotton tent. Maybe this tip is for next year. Check out Beth Terry's plastic-free guide for a lot more ideas about avoiding plastic in general: www.PlasticfreeGuide.com Also... Website: www.MyPlasticFreeLife.com

Food Tips:

TetraPak soups are not recyclable.

Choose foods that come in BPA-Free Cans, such as Amy's, Nijiya Market Brand, Muir Glen, Whole Foods Markets 365 brands, Wild Planet, Eden Organics, Native Forest, Vital Choice Mackrel and Sardines, Bionaturae canned tomatoes. And some Trader Joe's.

Replenishing your electrolytes:

Raw coconut water has a ton of electrolytes and potassium.
Coconut water in tetrapaks is lined with plastic that leaches, and is not recyclable.
Purchase it in cans. However, some of the really hard cans are not recyclable.

Pickles, Olives, celery in glass jars are a great snack on the playa, that resource your electrolytes.

Snacks ideas for your day pack:

- Chia sees are an incredible energy food full of omega 3 fatty acids, protein and fiber.
- Dried fruit, sunflower seeds, and nuts in bulk is an easy way to give you energy for biking across playa in the sun.
- Homemade beef jerky, you don't need a dehydrator.

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/emeric-lagasse/homemade-beef-jerky-recipe/index.html>

Other Playa food ideas:

Foods that do not require plastic packaging, and will last till later in the week:

Potatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, avocado, coconuts, carrots, onions, squash, cabbage, banana, lemons, limes, garlic, watermelon, pineapple, apples, oranges all, do well on the playa.

Storing vegetables and fruit in damp burlap bags ensure good ventilation and reduce the need for refrigeration.

Make a fruit compote at the end of the week from left over fruit like apples, plums and lemons.
Squeeze Lemon and Lime juice at home and put in reusable containers. Avoid buying those plastic lemons with juice.

Condiments that don't require plastic packaging:

Soy Sauce/Tamari, wasabi, balsamic vinegar, rice vinegar, salt, pepper, sesame oil, sesame seeds, coconut oil, other cooking oils, raw Honey in a tin or glass, hot sauce, horseradish, pickles, olives, bulk falafel mix ,bulk tahini and hummus mix nutritional yeast (available in bulk), bulk popcorn, and bulk granola.

Getting bulk dried beans, means you will have less trash.

Bring your own *Sodastream* for carbonated water and beverages. (Fresh lemon or lime, or cherry and pomegranate syrup)

Sodastream now carries a glass carafe. <http://www.sodastreamusa.com/Penguin-Glass-Carafe-P234.aspx>

We recommend getting your aluminum cans of beer, wine bottles without corks, and alcohol in glass.

You can make you're your margarita mix <http://tideandthyme.com/diy-margarita-mix/>
Stainless dish rack, cast iron pans, biodegradable bar of soap, cloth napkins, toothpicks,

Santa Cruz Organics makes a variety of juices in glass, hibiscus cooler, passion fruit nectar, limeade, cranberry nectar, red tart cherry, lemon ginger echinacea.

Make your own apple cider or purchase in glass.

<http://fromscratchclub.com/2011/09/30/diy-apple-cider-from-tree-to-tummy/>

Aluminum trays for lasagna or meatloaf/veggie loaf frozen at home and placed at the bottom of your cooler will keep the rest of your food without wasting space for ice.

Nothing like greeting the sunrise on the playa with a cold glass of pressed orange juice that you can also press at home and freeze. Many people store large burlap bags of beans, lentils and rice on a pallet with a reusable cover.

Large baskets (available in thrift stores) work great for small food containers, spices and supplies.

White vinegar is sold in glass and is great for everything to sanitation to taking care of your feet.

Grapefruit seed extract is a great germ killer, and substitute for bleach.

One jar of "[Better than Bouillon](#)" can last you an entire burn, and takes care of "playa throat". Coconut oil (available in jars) on your feet before bed ensure you will not get playa" foot". Cloth Bulk bags are great for your dried goods.

http://www.ecobags.com/Our_Products/Produce_Bags

Chicken Tikka Masala and red chicken curry can be premade frozen and plastic-free.

Contrary to many people's beliefs, you can safely freeze food in glass mason jars if you leave the top inch free for the liquid to expand. It would be nice to know your playa dinner isn't leaching harmful chemicals into your body.

Tips for 2014:

This year, **Plastic Pollution Coalition** facilitated two camps with attaining sustainably sourced, affordable, plastic-free playful “schwag”. Both **Dustfish**, and **Flaming Lotus Girls** were able to use this merchandise to raise funds for their theme camps, and ensure that these long lasting gifts would be useful for years to come. The **Plastic Pollution Coalition** can help your theme camp by getting the best pricing through our contacts, and acquiring in large quantities. Please contact **Karima Cherif** at karima@plasticpollutioncoalition.org. We will be sending a query email after **Decompression for 2014**. Here is an example of what was created for **Dustfish and Flaming Lotus Girls for 2013**:

