



TESTIMONY SUPPORTING THE PACKAGING REDUCTION AND RECYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE ACT
(A.5322/S.4246)

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION HEARING
October 24, 2023

My name is Jane Selden, and I'm testifying on behalf of 350NYC, a grassroots climate activist group that advocates for radically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and effecting a just transition to a renewable economy. **We at 350NYC know that the world cannot reach its greenhouse gas emission reduction goals without effectively addressing the environmental impact of plastic.** Nearly all plastic produced in the United States is a by-product of fracked gas, and, largely because of the fracking boom, plastic production has doubled in the last twenty years and is expected to almost triple by 2050 if nothing is done to stop it. The sourcing, production, and disposal of plastic not only contributes significantly to the climate crisis but has a disproportionate impact on the mostly low-income communities and communities of color who live near fracking sites, petrochemical plants, landfills, and incinerators.

The most effective way to address the proliferation of plastic is to reduce demand for it. Forty percent of plastic goes to packaging that is used once and then discarded. The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (PRRIA) is legislation that will require companies to reduce their packaging by 50% in twelve years, design packaging that is truly recyclable, and be financially responsible for managing its disposal. We strongly support this groundbreaking legislation and look forward to its passage.

New York City spends over 430 million dollars a year exporting its trash to incinerators and landfills in upstate New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. A third of this trash is composed of plastic and other packaging waste. Shifting the high cost of managing packaging waste from municipalities to the companies responsible for generating the waste will save municipalities – and taxpayers -- a substantial amount of money. It will also incentivize companies to redesign their packaging to minimize the cost of disposal or convert to reuse and refill systems. The bill also requires that any remaining packaging deemed “recyclable” can truly be recycled. This is not the case now; the current recycling rate for plastic is a dismal 6%.

One of the reasons recycling plastic is so problematic is that plastic products contain over 10,000 chemical additives, some of which have been identified as carcinogens and endocrine disruptors. The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act would ban twelve of these chemicals, including PFAS, mercury, lead, formaldehyde, and bisphenols, thereby making packaging safer for consumers.

Finally, the law would ban chemical recycling, a process that generally doesn't produce new plastic but instead turns plastic into "dirty" low-quality fuel that is then burned, generating greenhouse gases and toxic substances, including known carcinogens like benzene. These chemical recycling facilities and the incinerators where the waste is burned are generally sited in low-income communities and communities of color, who suffer from exposure to the hazardous waste and polluted air generated by these facilities.

Reduction, not recycling, is the best solution to the daunting problem of plastic pollution. The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act is the effective and comprehensive legislation we urgently need to reduce the production of single-use plastic. If New York State passes this bill, the strongest Extended Producer Responsibility legislation in the country, we will serve as a model for other states to follow.

Thank you.

Jane Selden
Co-Chair, WasteNøt/350NYC

The sourcing, production and disposal of plastic is not only a major contributor to the climate crisis but has a disproportionate impact on the health of low-income communities and communities of color. Communities that live near fracking sites are exposed to harmful air pollutants and water contamination. The EPA has in fact, identified 170 chemicals associated with fracking with known negative health impacts. A recent study from the Yale School of Public Health found that children living near fracking sites had a significantly higher risk of developing leukemia. The noxious effects of plastics production continue at the next stage of its lifecycle, the “cracker” plants that produce the building blocks of plastic products. The highest concentration of these plants is located along the Gulf Coast of Texas and Louisiana, where there are already 150 petrochemical plants and more in the planning stage