

NERC Material Reuse Forum

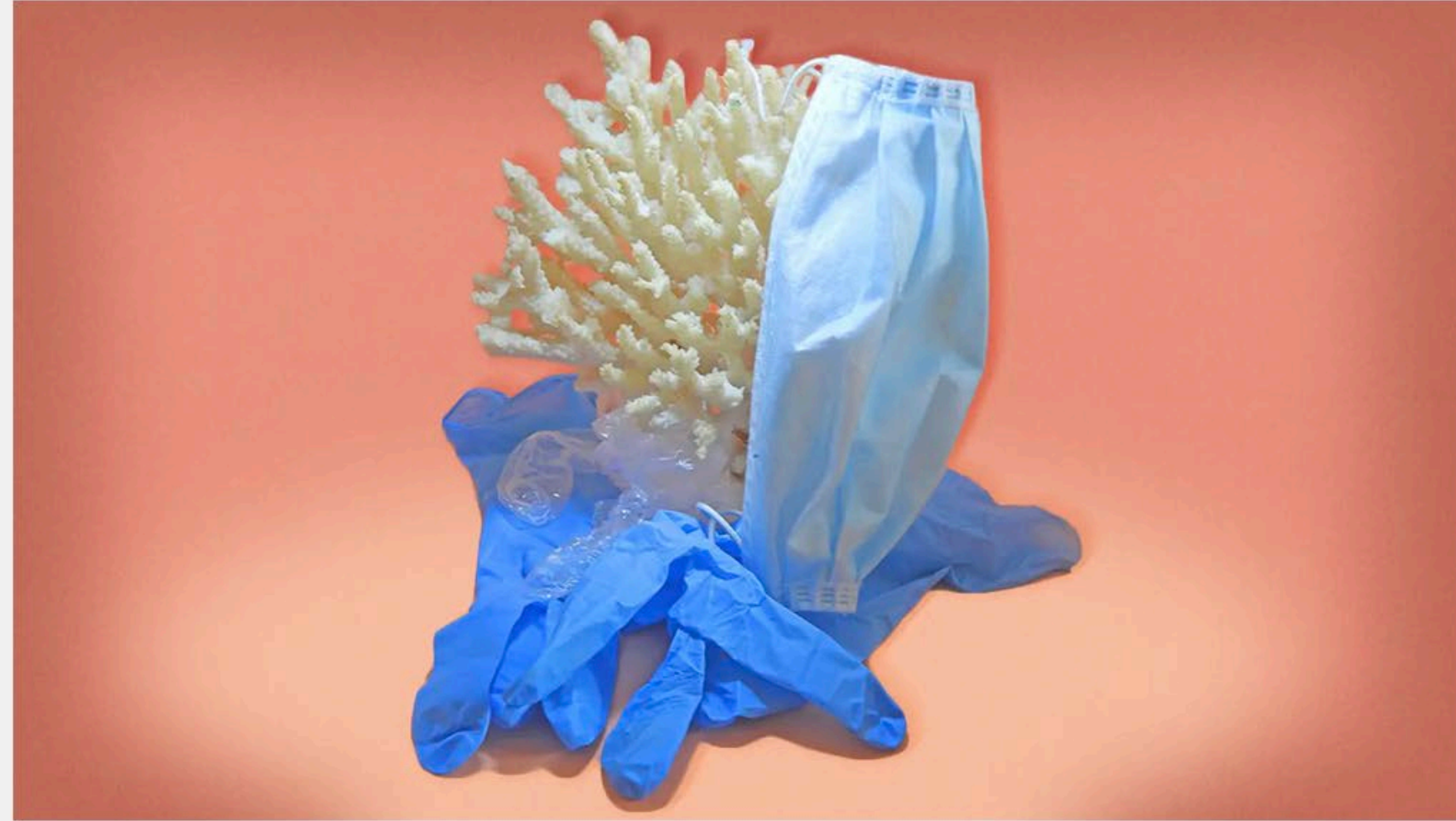
Joseph Winters

Sep 15, 2026

Origin stories

Great, now the ocean is filled with COVID trash: Masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer

Big Oil's pivot to plastic threatens marine life.



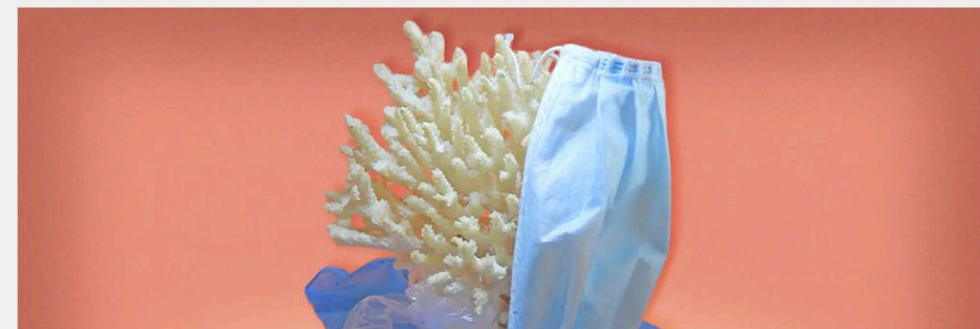
Grist / japatino / Getty Images

Origin stories

- Plastic waste management (landfill vs incineration)
- “Advanced” recycling
- Product bans and misinformation (e.g., cleanliness)
- Climate pollution

Great, now the ocean is filled with COVID trash: Masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer

Big Oil's pivot to plastic threatens marine life.



The world is drowning in used face masks. Should we turn them into fuel?

For unavoidable plastic waste, there are no good options.



Discarded face masks on side of road with trash, Queens, New York. *Lindsey Nicholson / Education Images / Universal Images Group via Getty Images*

This ‘solution’ to the plastic crisis is really just another way to burn fossil fuels

A new report says that “chemical recycling” isn’t recycling at all.



New York state’s plastic bag ban is finally being enforced

Empire State residents used to go through 23 billion plastic bags each year. Not anymore.



Report: Plastic is on track to become a bigger climate problem than coal

A new report details 10 ways, from fracking to incineration, that plastic contributes to global warming.



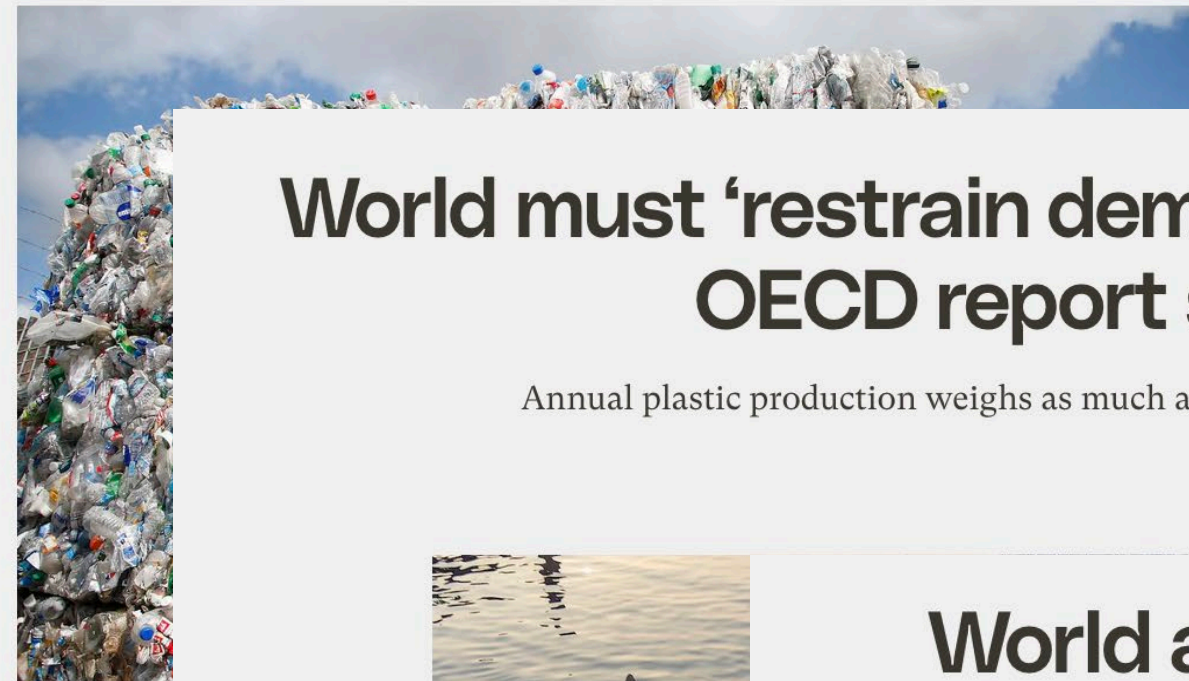
Citizen of the Planet / UIG via Getty Images

Origin stories

- Plastics laws: SB 343, SB 54, etc.
- U.N. plastics treaty

California wants to ban misleading recycling labels. Plastic companies don't.

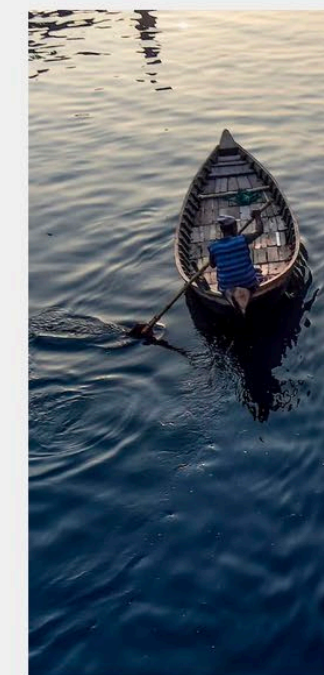
A new bill will stop the plastic industry from putting the “chasing arrows” symbol on plastic that can't be recycled.



Aric Crabb/Digita

World must 'restrain demand' for plastic, OECD report says

Annual plastic production weighs as much as 45,500 Eiffel Towers.



Munir Uzzaman / AFP via Getty Imag

World agrees to negotiate a 'historic' treaty on plastic pollution

By 2024, nations will broker a binding, international agreement to rein in plastic pollution — and production.



Jonas Gratzner / LightRocket via Getty Images

Origin stories

Using ‘recycled plastic’ in construction materials may not be a great idea after all

It's unclear whether this solution helps the environment — or that infrastructure infused with used plastic is structurally sound.



Workers lay down asphalt infused with plastic waste on a roadway in Turin, Italy. Stefano Guidi / Getty Images

How to build a zero-waste economy

These businesses say: reuse, refill, return.

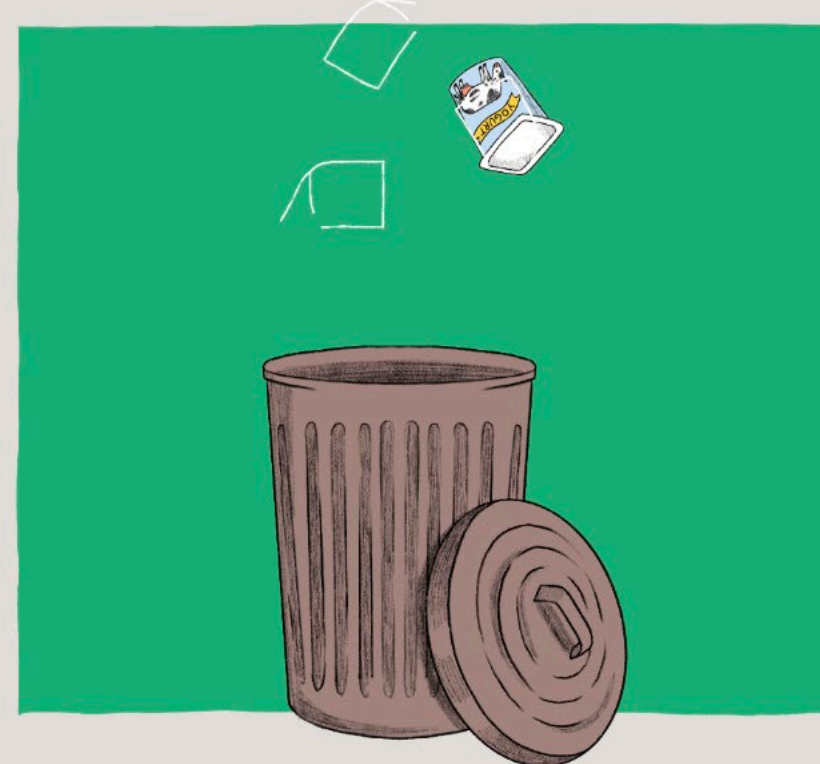
- Solutions: repair, reuse, zero-waste, “circular economy”

Companies are claiming to be ‘plastic neutral.’ Is it greenwashing?

Plastic credits can help fund waste cleanup, but they can also justify making more plastic.

Inside the industry push to label your yogurt cup ‘recyclable’

A network of groups backed by the plastics industry claims polypropylene containers are “widely recyclable,” despite ample evidence to the contrary.



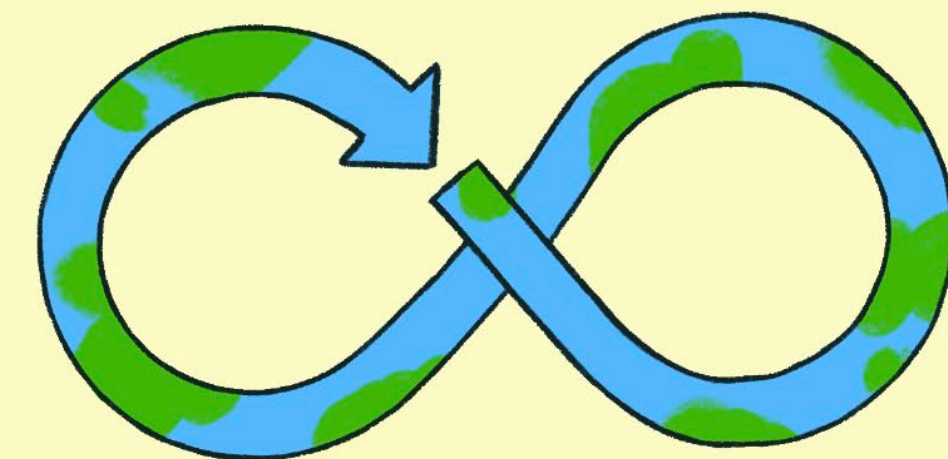
Grist / Amelia Bates

In France, zero-waste experiments tackle a tough problem: People’s habits

Local initiatives in Roubaix and Nouvelle-Aquitaine try different strategies for waste reduction — and behavior change.

How the ‘circular economy’ went from environmentalist dream to marketing buzzword

Can plastics be circular? At a recent conference, companies' answer was a resounding yes.



Grist / Amelia K. Bates

Pivots

- What does the circular economy mean?

The art of a plastics treaty: How sculptures, collages, and poetry have influenced global talks

As countries try to find agreement on plastic pollution, creative interventions are turning heads — and turning the conversation toward health harms, fossil fuels, and false solutions.

The world agreed to a global plastics treaty. Now comes the hard part.

Negotiators have little to show after a week of meetings in Uruguay.

Who's who at the plastics treaty talks, from delegates to lobbyists

Your guide to the major coalitions and observers.

Over 100 countries want an ambitious plastics treaty. Oil-producing nations are getting in the way.

"If it wasn't for Saudi and Russia we would have reached an agreement here."



Anthony Wallace / AFP via Getty Images

'Consensus kills ambition': UN plastics treaty talks end without an agreement

Procedural hurdles once again foil progress on a global agreement to end plastic pollution.



Juan Carlos Monterrey, a diplomat from Panama, speaks during a rally before the final plenary of the plastics treaty negotiations in Geneva.
Joseph Winters / Grist

Research

- “Circular economy’ discourse in the U.N. plastics treaty negotiations
- 700+ submissions during INC-1, INC-3, and INC-5.2, plus interviews
- The circular economy as a “floating signifier”



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Reporting and the media today

- Fewer journalists, less funding
- Plastics treaty fatigue
- Waste issues not as prominent

Challenges

- Opacity of the plastics, recycling industries
 - Hard to speak with industry
 - Poor access to recycling facilities
- Covering solutions
 - Too many PR pitches
 - Minor fixes vs. systemic change
- Finding the narrative

Looking forward

- EPR: Oregon lawsuit knock-on effects
- California laws: SB 343, SB 54
- Plastics litigation (e.g., public nuisance claims, consumer deception)
- EU circular economy initiatives
- U.N. treaty?