

## Necessity or Not?

How much plastic do you have in your lunchbox? A lot of people have single-use plastics in their lunchboxes and sometimes they don't even realise how bad plastic is for the environment. SDG 12 focuses on responsible consumption and production. As plastic is manufactured from irreplaceable fossil fuels, single-use plastic manufacture and use are covered under this goal.

Some people think that littering and plastic aren't that big of a deal but imagine if every single day, everyone at our school, South New Brighton, decided to bring plastic to school and litter. That would mean the possibility of 484 pieces of plastic going into our waters and the local community and 2420 pieces of rubbish being dropped every week!

As you have already read, a lot of plastic is being used. In just one class, 25 pieces of single-use plastic are going into different people's lunches, meaning at the end of the day it is chucked out.



*Photography of Celia Ward.*

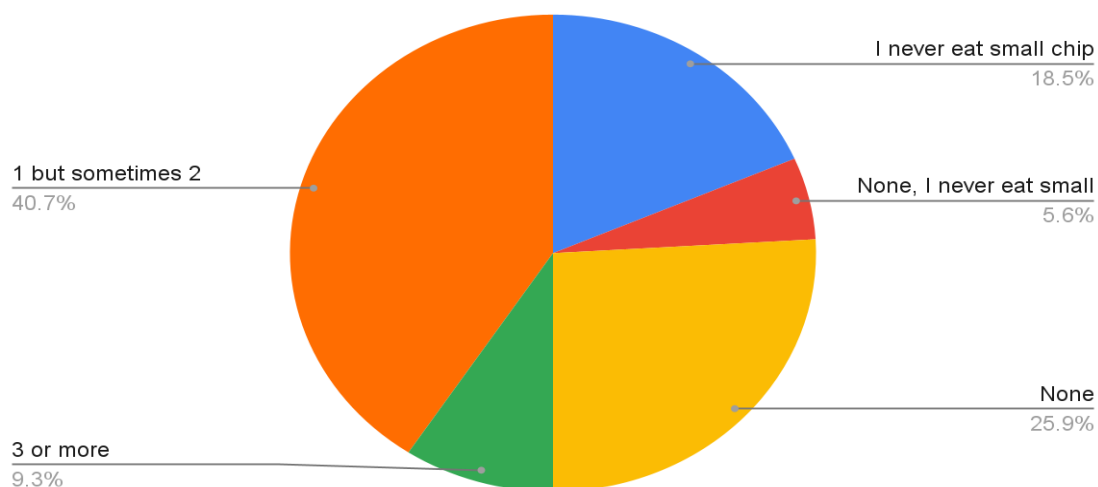
We took photos of student lunchboxes in our class to see how much single-use plastic was in them.

Many people don't think about the effect they are having on our environment. For example, if they are at the supermarket, most people look at the aisles of food and think, 'I like this, I'll get it, but they don't think about the plastic and the consequences of their choice. Of course, some people are totally aware of plastic and are constantly striving to use less plastic, but that is a tiny amount of people compared to the rest. As you can see, a lot of plastic is being used.

10% of the 260 million tonnes of plastic made each year is put into our oceans. That is twenty-six billion kgs of plastic in our ocean. Plastics often contain additives making them stronger, more flexible, and durable but many of these additives can extend the life of products if they become litter, with some estimates ranging to at least 400 years to break down. Did you know that one million plastic bags end up in the rubbish every minute? Millions of animals are killed by plastics every year, from birds to fish to other marine organisms. Nearly 700 species, including endangered ones, are known to have been affected by plastics. Nearly every species of seabird eats plastics which is over 350 species eating plastic weekly.

In our class at school, we have been looking into all the plastic that goes into our recycling bins. It's a lot! We've already had auditor stickers on the side of our bin. An auditor sticker is when the bin monitors from the Christchurch City Council come round and look in our bins. If there are contaminated items or non-recyclable items, they will move the bin back and place a sticker on it. After three stickers, the bin is confiscated and we can't use it anymore.

How many small convenience packets of snacks are in your lunch today?



This pie chart shows the amount of plastic in lunchboxes. The survey was completed by the seniors at our school.

Think about it, a reusable plastic container is better, even though it is plastic it lasts around five years and can be used for almost anything. Beeswax wraps are another great alternative for Glad Wrap and you can even make them at home using fabric, an iron, baking paper, and of course, beeswax. You could make beeswax wraps at school and then sell them like we did so that people will use less plastic. It's not like any of these things cost loads of money or are a giant change. We're not asking you to do something impossible, this is something that is expected, something that is needed.



*Photography of Celia Ward.*

This is our group making beeswax wraps to sell.

Another idea you could try at your school or home is World-Saving Wednesday. World-Saving Wednesday is where, on a Wednesday, you don't bring any single-use plastic in your lunchbox. We did this at our school. A small group of students made posters to hang in each classroom, and they shared about World-Saving Wednesday at assembly.

Fun fact: did you know that 50% of plastic in the world is recyclable but only 9% of it is recycled. Although New Zealand is a small country, every year we produce over 4500 tons of single-use plastic which is about the weight of 3000 cars.

Buying bulk bags rather than snack pack bags is better for the environment as well as cheaper. For example, a Bluebird packet of chips at Countdown is \$2.20 and it's 150g, and the Bluebird bag with little bags inside of it is 300g and it is \$5.00. Likewise, a Diamond box of pasta is \$2.30 and a plastic single-use pasta bag is \$2.30. Cardboard boxes are the same price according to the Countdown website so why can't Diamond stop using plastic and help save the environment?

Buying recyclable plastic items doesn't mean that you are going to recycle them. It's just like saying walking and biking to school is better for the environment but you still go in the car. If you choose to recycle, it saves around double the amount of energy compared to burning it in an incinerator.

In conclusion, we have explained how single-use plastics affect our local environment and that there are many alternatives including beeswax wraps, reusable containers, and sandwich bags. We also talked about the areas that are deeply affected by plastic and the species that die because of consuming plastic. We hope you have taken some of this into consideration and will begin by refusing to buy or use goods packaged in single-use plastics in your everyday life.

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