

Position Paper
Viceministry of Water and Oceans Affairs
Ministry of Environment and Energy of Costa Rica

Around the world the presence of marine litter is a serious issue because it prevents the conservation of ecosystem services which feed rivers, wetlands, seas and oceans. In Costa Rica, 25% of the 4000 tons of solid waste produced every day, ends in rivers and beaches (2015). That means 110 tons of plastic is disposed into the environment every day, and the trend is that this number is going to increase year after year. The majority of this percentage is single-use plastic, a material created to satisfy a specific need with a low cost, low weight, versatility and high resistance (properties which turn it into a huge enemy for the environment).

Additionally, the Government of Costa Rica being aware of the negative impacts of plastics, officially announced to the world on June 5th, 2017, that Costa Rica would become “the first country to eliminate single-use plastic” by 2021. The best way to make an initial change is to eliminate single-use plastic in local governments and public institutions (this became the government’s first step).

The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Environment and Energy, and the United Nations Development Program have created a national strategy to replace the consumption of single-use plastic with renewable and compostable alternatives. This governmental initiative pretends to contribute in solving the negative impact on the environment caused by plastics in the Greater Metropolitan Area (GAM) and its consequences in the Pacific Costa Rican coast. The aim is to reduce the consumption of single-use plastic and instead promote renewable and compostable products in the productive services and in Costa Rican society.

This strategy pretends to reduce 30% of the presence of plastic particles in rivers and coasts by 2021. The best way to achieve this is to commit to five strategic actions: municipal incentives, policies and institutional guidelines for suppliers; replacement of single-use plastic products; research; and development. In this way, we are working on the design of a plastic labeling tool in order to inform people about renewable and compostable alternatives, with the objective of increasing a behavioral change.

Furthermore, the Government of Costa Rica believes that encouraging sustainable and renewable ways of consumption is the best means to achieve the National Pact for the Sustainable Development Goals, with the vision of a healthy and ecological environment that brings better living conditions to society. For that reason, Costa Rica invites other countries in the region to get involved in these actions, to substitute single-use materials, and to collaborate in monitoring the impacts of plastics in the environment.

Bullet points

- Costa Rica has emerged as a global environmental leader. It has nearly a 100% renewable energy source electricity matrix and the goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2021.
- Costa Rica has been an example to the world by reversing deforestation and doubling its forest coverage from 26% in 1984 to more than 52% this year.
- Today one fifth of the 4,000 tons of solid waste produced daily is not collected and ends up as part of the Costa Rican landscape, also polluting rivers and beaches.
- Single-use plastic is a problem not only for Costa Rica but also for the whole world. It is estimated that if the current consumption pattern continues, by 2050 there will be more plastic in our oceans than fish, measured by weight.