

# REPORT

## Green Foundation Ireland and Community Resources Network Ireland co-host an afternoon WEBINAR on *Our Plastic Lives*



This webinar explored where plastics come from, how they end up in our lives and what we can do to use plastic wisely and prevent plastic waste.

### Speakers

**Féidhlim Harty (FH Wetland Systems):** *"The Hidden Cost of Carbon: How taxpayer funding of fossil fuels leads to proliferation of plastic waste"*

**Abigail O'Callaghan Platt (VOICE):** *"No Time for Plastic"*

**Garry Fitzpatrick (Refill Ireland):** *"Reusable Containers and Alternative to Single Use Plastics"*

**Claire Downey (CRNI):** *"Resources and How to Take Further Action"*

**Venue:** by Zoom *(details given after registration)*

**Wednesday 25 November 2020 – 15:30 to 17:00**

Admission to this event is **FREE** but you **MUST** register beforehand.  
You can do so through our website at [www.greenfoundationireland.ie](http://www.greenfoundationireland.ie)

# Our Plastic Lives



**Our Plastic Lives** was held as part of the European Week for Waste Reduction (EWWR) which encourages all Europeans to carry out awareness-raising actions about sustainable resources and waste management during a single week in November. In 2020 this week ran from 21 to 29 November. You can find out more about EWWR at [www.ewwr.eu](http://www.ewwr.eu)

## THEME

In this webinar we explored where plastics come from, how they end up in our lives and what we can do to use plastic wisely and prevent plastic waste.

## ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS

**Féidhlim Harty:** Féidhlim is director of FH Wetland Systems environmental consultancy in Ennis, Co. Clare specialising in constructed wetland, reed bed and zero discharge willow facility systems. He is the author of *Get Rid of Your Bin* and a new ebook just out from Permanent Publications called *Septic Tank Options and Alternatives – Your Guide to Conventional, Natural and Eco-Friendly Methods and Technologies*.

**Abigail O'Callaghan Platt:** Abigail joined VOICE as the Lead on the EPA funded No Home For Plastic project. She has a background in research on sustainability themes, completing a masters in Environmental Economics and Policy at Imperial College London before working as Principal Investigator on research projects with Trinity College Dublin and the Clean Technology Centre Cork. She lives in Cork and can occasionally be seen strutting the stage.

**Garry Fitzpatrick:** Garry is Lead Project Co-Ordinator at Refill Ireland, which is a campaign to reduce plastic bottle waste by encouraging people to bring their own water bottles and refill on the go instead of buying bottled water. By finding and mapping public water fountains and also encouraging as many businesses as possible to sign up to the Refill campaign – to offer quibble-free tap water refills – Refill Ireland is building a movement to address the growing problem of single-use plastic.

**Claire Downey:** Claire, who is a Director of Green Foundation Ireland, is Executive with Community Reuse Network Ireland (CRNI), an all-Ireland umbrella body funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that represents community based organisations involved in reuse and recycling. In this role she is responsible for the promotion of reuse, support for members to overcome barriers to reuse, communication and policy input, networking and research.

Our webinar was moderated by GFI Director **Claire Downey**, while **Nuala Ahern**, our former Chair, welcomed everyone by talking about how widespread the plastic problem had become. She then went on to introduce our first speaker.

**Féidhlim Harty** spoke about the taxpayer funding of the fossil fuel industry and how it leads to plastic waste. We tend not to look at the source of plastic, which is generally from fracked gas. There is heavy investment in petrochemicals and plastic – 200 billion dollars – with a projected growth of 40 per cent in the next 10 years. Plastic accounts for 14 per cent of fossil fuel consumption, with only 10 per cent of plastics being recycled.

The fossil fuel lobbyists have spent 250 million lobbying EU politicians in the last 10 years, and the EU Green Deal has been greatly influenced by corporate interests.

The Keep America Beautiful Campaign was introduced by the plastic industry – putting the onus on the people who litter or dump, while lobbying for increased plastic usage.

The plastic industry is privatising its profits while socialising its costs – local communities must clean up. And the Irish taxpayer funds the fossil fuel industry too.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) ties in limits to protection of the environment in order to protect company profits. The Corporate Europe Observatory has asked the EU to end lobbying by the fossil fuel industry, and also to stop politicians from working in fossil fuel industries after their time spent as a politician. Féidhlim said there is 'leapfrogging' in jobs between industry and politicians, so the regulators and the regulated are very close. The Corporate Europe Observatory also campaigns to stop subsidies to fossil fuel industries.

What about the polluter pays principle? Perhaps we need to pay for cleaning the micro-plastics from our washed clothing.

And what about recycling? We are recycling more, but also consuming more plastic waste. Féidhlim showed us a graph which demonstrated the amount of plastic being incinerated. We need to stop the supply.

So what can we do?

- We can live more frugally, buy in farmers markets and zero waste shops.
- We can support groups such as Stop Climate Chaos and Keep it in the Ground.
- We can lobby and campaign.
- We can buy in second-hand shops.
- We can hold a vision of a more equitable, interconnected biodiverse world.
- We can no longer accept the status quo.

Claire next ran a poll about our own use of plastics within the last week. The first question asked participants which single use items they had used in the past week. The most common response (40%) used was plastic wrapped snack (for example, crisps, biscuits, yogurt pot, etc), followed by disposable Coffee Cup (14%) then soft drinks bottles, water bottles and sandwich wrap (all 6%). 25% had not used any of the options given.

The second question for participants was about which types of masks they used. 76% of those on the call used reusable masks, while 21% used a mix of reusable and disposable masks and only 3% used disposable masks.

**Abigail O Callaghan Platt** introduced herself by telling us that she is a project manager with VOICE and runs the No Home for Plastic research project. This aims to raise awareness to prompt behaviour change and gather data on plastic use in the home and classroom.

As part of the project she conducted both a household and a schools programme. Each house undertook a plastic use audit, and changes were suggested. The household could then take plastic pledges.

Under the primary and secondary school programme, the students learned about plastics, organised a lunchbox audit, and followed this up by writing an action plan – and they also looked at plastic in their homes.

As well as this, secondary school students looked at supermarket plastics and conducted audits of their homes.

Out of 39 households, 16 took pledges to reduce plastics. Looking at the household survey results, it was discovered that:

- 48% of households use coffee capsules.
- 56% of households use cotton buds with plastic stems.
- 88% of households use liquid hand soap.

These statistics can easily be changed for the better. The study also examined the use of plastic 'on the go' – only 12% hadn't used plastic packaging in the previous week while outside.

63% of household participants were surprised by their plastic use. The study really increased awareness of the plastic usage within our lives.

Abigail went on to mention that VOICE looked at barriers to stopping plastic usage in households. There was a lack of plastic free options in supermarkets. Small towns do not have access to zero waste shops, and it may not suit people's lifestyles to shop in small shops and plastic free shops. Also, it is often cheaper to buy plastic wrapped options, such as vegetables, when special offers are pre-packaged.

As stated above, after the audit 16 households in the study took Plastic Pledges, vowing to reduce their plastic usage. Some households stopped drinking bottled water, while others decided to try using disposable nappies. School students took on an action plan to reduce plastic usage in lunchboxes. Some insisted on reusable bottles, and others moved to wooden knives and forks.

There are a lot of easily avoidable plastics. The auditing tool was very successful, and Abigail indicated that VOICE will develop it more.

Our next speaker was **Garry Fitzpatrick** who is the lead project co-ordinator for Refill Ireland. He spoke to us about Refill Ireland, which is a not-for-profit social enterprise. He started with the shocking fact that 2.5 million plastic bottles are generated in Ireland every day.

Refill Ireland advocates for the instillation and restoration of public drinking fountains. They have created a Tap Map App, which shows where you can find a public tap or a tap provided by local businesses.

Garry continued by mentioning that Refill Ireland also provides community refill hubs and, in order to pay for this, they run zero waste events. They provide reusable cups at events such as marathons, races, etc. This also reduces CO<sub>2</sub> levels. They are currently working on a cup delivery system.

They also sell reusable bottles, which can have a school or business logo on it. Garry then stated that ideally public taps should be placed in parks, libraries, community halls, etc. The Tap Map App can be downloaded at Refill Ireland. And we each must ask our Local Councillors for taps in our areas.

**Claire Downey** then shared several resources to help with our actions and urged us to bypass black Friday by shopping, if we had to, in charity shops.

**Resources**

- GREEN FOUNDATION IRELAND** [www.greenfoundationireland.ie](http://www.greenfoundationireland.ie)
- mywaste** [mywaste.ie/](http://mywaste.ie/)
- CRNI** [cni.ie/directory](http://cni.ie/directory)  
[cni.ie/reuse-toolkits-communities/](http://cni.ie/reuse-toolkits-communities/)  
[cni.ie/videos](http://cni.ie/videos)  
[cni.ie/events](http://cni.ie/events)
- epa** [epa.ie/waste/nwpp/](http://epa.ie/waste/nwpp/)  
data & research
- CRNI Publications** [cni.ie/publications](http://cni.ie/publications)
- VOICE** [Reducing Plastic Waste videos playlist](#)  
urging greener choices now!
- THE STORY OF PLASTIC** <https://www.storyofplastic.org/>
- REPAIR MYSTUFF.ie** [repairmystuff.ie](http://repairmystuff.ie)
- jiminy** [jiminy.ie/collections/borrows](http://jiminy.ie/collections/borrows)
- Carbon measure - reutilizayevitaco2.aress.org/en**

With almost 50 people attending, there were lively Q&A sessions after each speaker as well as at the end.

The talks on plastics were wonderful and informative. I will immediately audit my house, and I'm sure I will be shocked at the results!

**Donna Mullen, Chairperson**  
**Green Foundation Ireland**

**27 November 2020**