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Biden Can Lead on Regulating Plastic Pollution

Over 600 groups ask new president to approve the Presidential Plastics Action Plan

By Miyoko Sakashita

Plastic pollution permeates everything. We see it in our oceans and littering our coastlines, but microplastics are also in our [bodies](#), [seafood](#), [seabirds](#), [drinking water](#) and even the [placentas](#) that nurture our babies in the womb.

Yet the fossil fuel industry is dead set on making more plastic.

That's why we've assembled a national coalition of almost 600 organizations asking incoming President Joe Biden to adopt our [Presidential Plastics Action Plan](#). It's a series of executive actions he can take without Congress, including blocking new plastic projects, using federal purchasing power to curb single-use plastics and protecting frontline communities from the toxic pollution created by plastic manufacturing.

The petrochemical industry has been aggressively [increasing](#) U.S. plastic production using our oversupply of fracked gas. But the Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies have totally failed to regulate this superpolluting industry or update the [decades-old rules](#) that govern it.

At the Dec. 8 [press conference](#) we held to announce our plan, two women spoke whose stories are emblematic of how the federal government is failing in its basic duty to protect public health and regulate big polluters.

Diane Wilson made headlines last year by winning a \$50 million cleanup settlement from “[serial offender](#)” Formosa Plastics for polluting Texas waterways with billions of plastic nurdles. But enforcement of the Clean Water Act shouldn't require a 72-year-old woman and her allies to collect plastic pollution garbage every day for years. That should be the EPA's job.

Sharon Lavigne has also given years of her life to reining in Formosa Plastics — in her case, to stop it from building one of the world's largest plastic plants in her St. James Parish, Louisiana community. It would more than double toxic air pollution in a corridor along the Mississippi River known as Cancer Alley, where industrial polluters have already caused high rates of disease and death among poor, Black residents.

Yet this dirty, destructive project was given \$1.5 billion in state and local tax breaks — and had its federal permits rubber-stamped by the Army Corps of Engineers — without a full environmental impact study or any significant analysis of plastic pollution, public health, impacts on the burial sites of enslaved people or the environmental racism behind the siting decision.

“With God’s help, I’m still hopeful that we’ll stop Formosa Plastics from building here. But we also need help from the federal government, which has ignored the plight of poor Black communities and the plastic pollution crisis for way too long,” Lavigne said at our press conference. “We want Joe Biden to stop this insane petrochemical buildout, protect vulnerable frontline communities and slow the flow of plastic pollution.”

Along with Lavigne’s group RISE St. James and other local organizations, the Center for Biological Diversity, where I work, sued the feds for ignoring federal law on this project, and the Army Corps recently [suspended that permit](#) as a result. But we haven’t won the case yet — and it shouldn’t be up to us to do the federal government’s job of protecting the American people from life-threatening pollution.

President Trump and the corrupt industry hacks he put into key regulatory positions actively made this a dirtier, more dangerous country. But the plastic pollution crisis — which is intertwined with the climate and extinction crises — has worsened over many decades, from multiple administrations’ willful neglect and active collusion with industry.

That has to change, and it has to change now. The hopeful part is that it *can* — with a simple stroke of Biden’s executive pen, using the Presidential Plastics Action Plan as a guide.

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