

# Despite Federal legislation, single-use straws continue to be a common litter item in Toronto

## BACKGROUND

Despite being included as one of six items in the Canadian Federal government's single-use plastic ban (in effect since December 2023), plastic straws are still being offered by some businesses and are a common litter item found in the environment in Canada.



Straws collected during a litter cleanup at a beach in Toronto. (© K. Carrozza, May 2022)

## OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate if, and how, Toronto foodservice businesses have responded to the federal ban on single-use plastic straws.
- Quantify and characterize single-use straw litter in the aquatic environment and terrestrial environment.
- Assess how effective the federal single-use plastic ban has been to reduce single-use straw litter in Toronto.



Straws captured from a trash trap deployed in the Toronto Harbour (© R. Lee, June 2025)

## KEY FINDINGS

### 48% of businesses are violating the single-use plastics ban.

- 38% of 147 surveyed Toronto foodservice businesses continue to offer plastic single-use straws to customers. In addition, 10% were found to use straws made from bioplastics, which are also included in the ban.

### Plastic straws are still a common form of litter in Lake Ontario.

- In 2025 alone, the University of Toronto Trash Team diverted ~862 single-use straws from Lake Ontario using aquatic trash traps and skimming. We found that 95% of these straws were plastic.

### The ban has not been effective in reducing straw pollution.

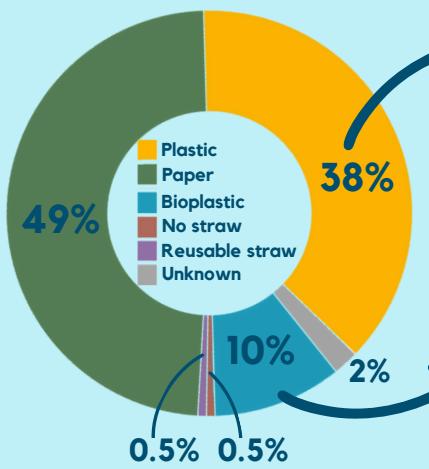
- Cleanup data indicates that the quantity of single-use straws collected in 2025 has gone up compared to previous years, including since 2024.

### Further action is required to prevent single-use plastic straws from becoming litter in the environment.

# RESULTS:

**Single-use plastic straws continue to be used by Toronto foodservice businesses and end up as a common litter item in Lake Ontario.**

Surveying 147 foodservice businesses in Toronto in August 2025, we found:



38% of businesses continue to offer plastic straws to customers.

Though also included in the federal single-use plastic ban, 10% of businesses are using bioplastic straws.

**Plastic straw use by business type:**

43% of fast food restaurants

42% of fast casual restaurants

38% of coffee shops

26% of full service restaurants

24% of bars

46% of other establishments

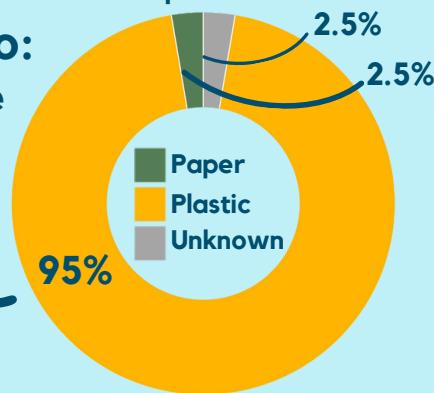
Toronto does not have industrial composting infrastructure to process most bioplastics.

## From trash trap devices deployed in Lake Ontario:

We estimate to have diverted 5,020 single-use straws from Lake Ontario since 2021, with 2,813 of those just in 2025!

95% of sampled straws collected from aquatic trash traps deployed May - August 2025 were plastic.

We also observed an increase in straws collected by volunteers during litter cleanups in both 2024 and 2025.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enforcement of the current ban of single-use plastic straws.
2. Education for customers and foodservice businesses about current legislation for single-use plastics in Canada.
3. Regulations regarding labelling of bioplastics to better inform consumers and foodservice businesses about what should be done with them at the end of their life.
4. Provide financial incentives to customers and foodservice businesses encouraging them to adopt sustainable replacements for plastic straws (e.g., using lids that do not require a straw, customers bring their own reusable straw or offering reusable straws for dine-in settings).
5. Conduct surveys of foodservice businesses across Canada to monitor long-term changes following the ban.

**This policy brief was prepared by Madeleine Milne and Chelsea Rochman**

For questions please contact: [madeleine.milne@utoronto.ca](mailto:madeleine.milne@utoronto.ca) & [chelsea.rochman@utoronto.ca](mailto:chelsea.rochman@utoronto.ca)

Created with the support of the  
U of T Trash Team and Community Matters Toronto



**U of T  
Trash Team**



**COMMUNITY  
MATTERS  
TORONTO**