



Riverkeeper's 2021 Legislative Memorandum

Support - S1505/A207 (Hoylman/Rosenthal L) - Support

AN ACT to amend the environmental conservation law and the general business law, in relation to prohibitions on single-use plastic straws in restaurants

Riverkeeper strongly supports this legislation, which would ensure straws are only offered to consumers upon specific request and support the increased adoption of straws made from biodegradable materials. Additional action on plastic pollution, beyond the recent ban on single-use plastic bags, is necessary to address the global plastic pollution crisis.

A recent report estimates that by 2050 the growing plastics industry will use between 10-13 percent of the global carbon budget (equivalent to over 615 five-hundred MW coal-fired power plants), seriously threatening global efforts to combat climate change.¹

Microplastics have been documented in waters and the bodies of marine life around the world, including here in New York. Studies have revealed concentrations as high as 578,333 microplastics per km² in parts of the Hudson.² To protect both human and environmental health, urgent action is needed to reduce the flow of plastic into our waterways.

Nationwide, straws and stirrers are among the top 10 most commonly found items at beach cleanups.³ Data from our annual Riverkeeper Sweep on the Hudson and its tributaries mirror these national results. The average straw is used for only minutes or hours, but persists for centuries, breaking down into smaller microplastic particles that plague our waterways and act as magnets for industrial contaminants.⁴

Since they typically are not recyclable and are light enough to blow out of waste receptacles, the best opportunity for preventing plastic pollution from straws is to reduce their use. Providing straws only upon request will meaningfully accomplish this while ensuring straws are still readily accessible for community members with disabilities who rely on them. This bill is a critical step in reducing the number of straws littering our streets and entering our waterways, and will ultimately protect the health of humans and ecosystems across New York.

¹ <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Plastic-and-Climate-Executive-Summary-2019.pdf>

² https://hudsonriverpark.org/assets/content/general/Microplastic_Short_Report_Final.pdf

³ <https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Building-A-Clean-Swell.pdf>

⁴ http://publicfiles.surfrider.org/Plastics/Plastic_Straw_Program_Activist_Toolkit.pdf