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Amazon's Big Role in Ocean Plastic Pollution Company Generated More Than 211 Million Kilograms of Plastic Packaging Waste in 2019 According to Report by Oceana

Oceana calls on Amazon to address its contribution to the plastic disaster that is devastating the world's oceans and marine life and provide its customers with plastic-free choices

TORONTO — Oceana has today released a report – based on an analysis of e-commerce packaging data – that found Amazon generated 211 million kilograms of plastic packaging waste last year. This is comprised of the air pillows, bubble wrap and other plastic packaging items added to the approximately seven billion Amazon packages delivered in 2019, according to news accounts.¹ The report found that Amazon's estimated plastic packaging waste, in the form of air pillows alone, would circle the Earth more than 500 times.

The study also, by combining the e-commerce packaging data with findings from a recent study published in *Science*,² estimates that up to 10.18 million kilograms of Amazon's plastic packaging waste entered and polluted the world's freshwater and marine ecosystems in 2019, the equivalent of dumping a delivery van payload of plastic into the oceans every 70 minutes.

It also found that Amazon's Canadian plastic footprint is disproportionately large, generating an estimated 21.3 million kilograms of plastic waste in Canada in 2019 – 1.2 times more than in India, and more than Japan, Brazil, Spain and Mexico combined. The online retail giant has cornered 48 per cent of the Canadian e-commerce market, with estimated sales in 2019 exceeding \$9 billion (CDN).

"Amazon is ubiquitous in Canada. Unfortunately, so is plastic packaging, which makes up about half of our total plastic waste," said Josh Laughren, Executive Director, Oceana Canada. "Given how much value Amazon is getting from Canadian consumers – including from people in remote communities where few other options are available – it has a moral obligation to offer plastic-free packaging to ensure this doesn't come at a great cost to the health of our oceans and environment."

¹ Amazon [announced](#) that it delivered 3.5 billion packages through its own delivery systems in 2019. Amazon (2019) Amazon spokespeople were quoted– in subsequent stories in [Vox](#), [US News](#) and other outlets - that this represented "approximately half" of the company's global shipping volume (and the rest was shipped through other carriers, like UPS).

² Borrelle SB, Ringma J, Law KL et.al. (2020) Predicted growth in plastic waste exceeds efforts to mitigate plastic pollution. *Science* 369 (2020), 1515–8. DOI: 10.1126/science.aba3656

“The amount of plastic waste generated by the company is staggering and growing at a frightening rate,” noted Oceana’s Senior Vice President, Matt Littlejohn. “Our study found that the plastic packaging and waste generated by Amazon’s packages is mostly destined, not for recycling, but for the landfill, the incinerator or the environment including, unfortunately, our waterways and sea, where plastic can harm marine life. It’s time for Amazon to listen to its customers, who, according to recent surveys want plastic-free alternatives, and make real commitments to reduce its plastic footprint.”

Plastic is a major source of pollution and is devastating the world’s oceans. Recent studies estimated that 90 per cent of all seabirds³ and 52 per cent of all sea turtles⁴ have ingested plastic. Sea turtles and other ocean animals mistake the kind of plastic used by Amazon as food, which can ultimately prove fatal. Scientific reports have estimated that only nine per cent of all plastic ever produced has been recycled and 91 per cent has ended up in landfills, incinerated or in the environment, including the oceans.⁵ The rapidly growing plastic pollution crisis needs to be solved by major plastic polluters like Amazon taking steps to reduce plastics, rather than making empty claims about recycling.

The report discloses that the type of plastic often used in packaging by Amazon, referred to as plastic film, is effectively not recycled, despite the company’s claims of recyclability. Most municipal curbside recycling programs in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom do not accept this kind of plastic.

The report also found that:

- Amazon customers overwhelmingly want the company to reduce plastic packaging. Oceana surveyed more than 5,000 Amazon customers in Canada, the U.S. and the UK in 2020 and found that 86 per cent were concerned about plastic pollution and its impact on the oceans; 92 per cent were upset that plastic recycling does not work; and 87 per cent wanted Amazon and other major online retailers to offer plastic-free packaging choices at checkout.
- Unlike other companies seeking to move away from plastic, Amazon appears to be prioritizing the increased use of “flexible packaging” made of plastic. It has stated it uses flexible packaging to help protect the climate and environment⁶ but has not publicly disclosed the data underlying this claim or its plastic footprint.
- Amazon has already shown it can rapidly reduce plastic packaging on a very large scale. After India passed a law to fight plastic pollution, Amazon eliminated plastic packaging from fulfillment centers in India⁷ and has introduced a paper-based lightweight mailer that it reports has been

³ Kühn S and van Franeker JA (2020) Quantitative overview of marine debris ingested by marine megafauna. *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 151: 110858. doi: 10.1016/j.marpolbul.2019.110858

⁴ Wilcox C, Puckridge M, Schuyler Q, Townsend K and Hardesty B (2018) A quantitative analysis linking sea turtle mortality and plastic debris ingestion. *Scientific Reports* 8 (2018), 12536. doi: 10.1038/s41598-018-30038-z. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6137038/>. Accessed Sep 20, 2020.

⁵<https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/3/7/e1700782#:~:text=Of%20this%2C%20approximately%20800%20Mt,2>.

⁶ Houchens K (2020) Amazon: Addressing the challenges of e-commerce. *Packaging Europe*. 10 March 2020. Available <https://packagingeurope.com/amazon-addressing-the-challenges-of-e-commerce/>. Accessed Sep 20, 2020

⁷ -- (2020) Amazon India successfully eliminates 100% single-use plastic in packaging across its Fulfillment Centers. Amazon, 29 June 2020. Available: <https://blog.aboutamazon.in/sustainability/amazon-india-successfully-eliminates-100-single-use-plastic-in-packaging-across-its-fulfillment-centers#:~:text=Sustainability->

used 100 million times.⁸ Amazon has failed to apply these clear steps forward on a company-wide level to solve its plastic problem.

- Amazon's plastic waste and pollution footprint is expected to drastically increase, given analysts' recent estimates that the company sales will increase by more than a third in 2020.⁹

The report calls on Amazon to reduce its plastic footprint and:

- Listen to its customers: As an immediate measure, Amazon should give its customers what they want and offer plastic-free packaging as an option at checkout.
- Be fully transparent and hold itself accountable for its plastic footprint and environmental impact as it already has for climate change: Amazon should report on its plastic footprint on a regular basis. This data should be independently verified.
- Eliminate plastic packaging as it has already done in India. Amazon should also increase products shipped in reusable containers and adopt policies that can be demonstrated to reduce plastic pollution, rather than making empty claims about "recyclability."

To access the full Oceana report, please visit oceana.org/PlasticFreeAmazon. To find out about Oceana's campaign to reduce plastics, go to oceana.org/plastics. To find out more about Oceana Canada's campaign to end the plastic disaster, go to oceana.ca/plastics.

Oceana is the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana is rebuilding abundant and biodiverse oceans by winning science-based policies in countries that control one-third of the world's wild fish catch. With more than 225 victories that stop overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution, and the killing of threatened species like turtles and sharks, Oceana's campaigns are delivering results. A restored ocean means that 1 billion people can enjoy a healthy seafood meal, every day, forever. Together, we can save the oceans and help feed the world.

Oceana Canada was established as an independent charity in 2015 and is part of the largest international advocacy group dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana Canada has successfully campaigned to end the shark fin trade, make rebuilding depleted fish populations the law, improve the way fisheries are managed and protect marine habitat. We work with civil society, academics, fishers, Indigenous Peoples and the federal government to return Canada's formerly vibrant oceans to health and abundance. By restoring Canada's oceans, we can strengthen our communities, reap greater economic and nutritional benefits and protect our future.

,Amazon%20India%20successfully%20eliminates%20100%25%20single%2Duse%20plastic%20in%20packaging,an%20environmentally%20sustainable%20supply%20chain. Accessed Sep 20, 2020.

⁸ <https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/sustainability/the-big-ideas-and-tiny-details-behind-amazons-new-recyclable-mailer>

⁹ <https://finance.yahoo.com/quote/AMZN/analysis>