

## What's the Problem with Compostable Plastic?

Compostable plastic is a material marketed as a more sustainable alternative to conventional plastic, and is increasingly used for foodware, bin liners, and packaging. Despite being designed to break down under controlled industrial composting conditions, the compostable plastic materials that are currently available create significant challenges for composting systems and rarely deliver promised environmental benefits. And even though these “compostable” products consist largely of plant-based materials (from corn or sugarcane), some are derived from fossil fuels, and most still contain plastic additives derived from petroleum-based materials. **Below are some of the issues surrounding compostable plastic:**



### Just because a product is labeled “compostable” doesn’t mean it actually gets composted

- Most compost facilities can’t distinguish compostable from conventional plastic and remove both during processing.
- Opaque compostable bags make it difficult to identify contents, so they’re often removed with food scraps inside, sending both to landfill where they release methane.
- Composters who sell Certified Organic compost are not allowed by state and federal law to include compostable plastic in the compost they make.

### They perpetuate a “throw-away” culture

- Compostable plastic foodware doesn’t solve our single-use, throw-away culture problem.
- Like conventional plastic, compostable items become litter in waterways and oceans where they don’t properly decompose.
- Compostable plastic products have environmental costs and use extensive resources throughout their lifecycle – from agriculture to disposal.

### Research suggests compostable plastics leave microplastic pollution in the soil

- Compostable plastic at commercial facilities doesn’t always fully degrade and can leave behind microplastics that linger in soil and enter food systems and waterways.
- Even “certified compostable” products only require 90% biodegradation, leaving small plastic particles in finished compost.

### Compostable plastics cost consumers and businesses more and don’t work all that well

- Compostable products are often more expensive and less effective than conventional ones, leaving businesses paying more for what they think is doing the right thing.
- Marketing pushes compostable bags for food scraps, but they create challenges for facilities, often resulting in both bags and scraps going to landfill.

## A Better Path Forward

The best solution is upstream – avoiding single-use disposables of any kind and opting for reusables whenever possible to curtail plastic pollution, prevent contamination of our soils, and harm to our health.

StopWaste is engaging member agencies and policy makers to advocate for better solutions. For example, we’re:

- **Providing clear, evidence-based guidance** grounded in compost facility realities
- **Helping member agencies navigate relevant policies** such as SB 54 and AB 1201 implementation
- **Educating residents and businesses** on easy ways to compost food scraps without relying on compostable bags
- **Working with composters and businesses to find viable alternatives** to current compostable plastics that work in practice.
- **Advancing upstream solutions** – reuse, refill, and waste reduction – that reduce reliance on single-use plastic of any kind.

[Visit our website](#) for more details about compostable plastic, along with suggested alternatives for residents and businesses.