

GREEN PORTAGE – Working to be Plastic Free

Author: Kurt Ruehr, Executive Director, Leadership Portage County



I catch it out of the corner of my eye; A little movement in the brush. I turn my head and the creature reveals itself in all of its glory. There, perched in the thin upper branches of a bush sits a plastic shopping bag. This particular creature is of the blue species, though white is also very common along with other lesser seen varieties such as green and brown. They usually tend to live where the wind deposits them into some branches or they get stuck in a puddle. I stop and consider it for a moment in disbelief, then pick it up and stuffed it into my pocket and carry it out of the woods. Alas, what can I do? I'm sure that you've seen them too. I start to pay more attention and begin looking for them. To my dismay I see them everywhere.

The news is chock-full of stories about pollution in the oceans, plastic bags and trash being found in dead marine life, and the overall harm humans are doing to the wild. While we may not have an ocean in Portage County, there are still problems we face in our own community. So, for the environmentalists, the earth lovers, and anyone who feels a twinge of sadness or anger when they see trash in their community, streets, or neighborhoods, how can we help?

You can try to limit or completely stop your usage of plastic bags, water bottles, straws, and other plastic products. Last year I made a resolution to not use disposable shopping bags. I did a pretty decent, but not perfect job. It helps to keep a few reusable bags in your car for when you go shopping. This year I am trying again and adding in plastic bottles. Buying a reusable water bottle will help you save money and the environment. Any step you can take to limit your plastic usage is a step in the right direction. Another opportunity to reduce your plastic usage is buying reusable straws. There are compostable, bamboo, silicone, glass, and metal straws- on the market to choose from, find the kind you like. Some even have a keychain attached for easy travel. You can also help limit your plastic footprint by purchasing items that are not packaged in plastic. I have found plastic bags, water bottles and other plastic waste in the woods, fields and streams of Portage County.

Recycling is another great way to cut down on plastic in landfills. If you do not already recycle, try to start! Just keep a separate bin by your trash cans. If your neighborhood, workplace, or school does not recycle, initiate it! Look up the nearest recycling drop off by you and start collecting. There are five core items to recycle: cans, cartons, glass bottles and jars, paper and boxes, and plastic bottles and jugs. Remember to rinse out any food particles before you recycle these items and dry off excess water before tossing in the bin. Garbage mixed in with recyclables is a problem, every time we don't follow the core recycling guidelines the cost of waste management increases for everyone.

As a member of the Portage Park District Foundation, I can also suggest volunteering with the Portage Park District to keep our communities free of trash. While you're out for a hike in Towner's Woods, Dix Park or any of our other wonderful parks, bring a bag with you and pick up trash you see along the way.

I would like to invite you to join me. As humans, we do not like to accept a problem until it is directly in front of our faces. We must pick up the slack and tackle the daunting task of pollution, lest it overcome the Earth and destroy millions of ecosystems. Let's make Portage County part of the solution to pollution!