



The advantages and disadvantages of plastic packaging

[Packaging Innovation](#) | June 30, 2014

Despite popular belief **plastic packaging** is not always the worst choice from an environmental viewpoint. In fact, plastic has some benefits other materials generally believed to be eco-friendly, glass to name one, lack. While both materials can be recycled, in reality **over forty percent of the plastic made is recycled** every year, while only twenty percent of the glass containers are recycled. This and other benefits of plastic will be the focus of this article.

Plastic debris is a huge threat

A lot of research has been conducted on the impact of plastic on the environment and it goes without saying that **packaging waste is a huge problem**. Plastic debris poses a huge threat to our eco system, [filling up our oceans](#) and poisoning wildlife. Yet, manufacturers still choose plastic over glass in many cases. Why is that? As it turns out, it's not simply a matter of cost-saving.

Plastic is more flexible than glass

As you'd expect a lot of factors have to be taken into account when deciding what packaging materials to use for a product. Things like shape, weight, recyclability and cost all have to be addressed. Take the **food industry**, for instance, where PET and other plastic containers are still widely used. One of the biggest benefits of plastic here is its flexibility. While glass can be shaped to contain a whole range of different products, plastic has even more possibilities. Apart from bottles, plastic can be molded into all kinds of shapes – and quite easily so – such as canisters, trays and containers.

Transportation and storing plastic

Additionally, plastic packaging generally takes up less space than glass, allowing more products to be stored within the same room. Plastic is also much lighter than glass, a benefit consumers who are prone to buy in bulk greatly appreciate. Finally, the weight and space issue is a big deal from a **logistics perspective** as more items can be crammed into one truck.

Plastic takes up less energy to recycle

Then there's the question of recyclability. Both glass and plastic containers can be recycled, yet in reality glass is recycled less than plastic packaging. Why? Because **glass generally requires more energy** to be recycled. The [Glass Packaging Institute](#) notes that recycling glass uses 66 percent of the energy it would take to manufacture new glass on average, while plastic only requires 10 percent of the energy it takes to produce new plastic.

Conclusion?

That's not to say that plastic is always the best choice for manufacturers, though. However you put it, plastic remains a **toxic product** that undeniably impacts our environment. Clearly, society in general, and the packaging world in particular, still need to take a few steps forward to solve this huge problem.