

GrubHub, Delivery.com, Doordash, Seamless, PostMates & Caviar Asked to “Hold The Single-Use Plastics, Please”

More than 125 environmental groups ask the food delivery companies to make a small change with a big impact

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New York City, NY – More than 125 environmental organizations sent letters to six national food delivery companies today asking that they change their default ordering process to one that does not automatically include utensils, napkins, condiments, and straws in order to reduce the tsunami of single-use plastic pollution entering our oceans, landfills and incinerators. Instead, customers would need to specifically request these single-use items when they place their order for delivery — “opting in” to receive the specific items they want — reducing costs to restaurants and taking an important step to protect our environment.

“Takeout orders are up all over the country as a result of the COVID pandemic; however, the vast majority of people eating at home neither need nor want yet another set of plastic utensils, plastic straws, handful of soy sauce or ketchup packets, or pile of paper napkins. Committing to making this small change to their delivery ordering systems would help reduce single-use packaging and save restaurants a bit of money,” said Judith Enck, president of Beyond Plastics.

The letter, addressed to Grubhub/Seamless, DoorDash/Caviar, Postmates, and Delivery.com, lays out the argument that making these changes will be a win-win-win proposition, saving restaurants money, keeping customers from overflowing drawers of unwanted soy sauce packets, and keeping plastic pollution out of our communities, parklands, beaches, waterways, and the ocean.

“Food delivery platforms have the opportunity to reduce the amount of plastic entering our homes while at the same time saving businesses money by moving to an opt-in system for these items. Similar to how customers choose exactly which toppings they want on their pizza, customers should also be able to opt in to exactly which utensils, napkins, condiments, or straws they want,” said Jennie Romer, Legal Associate at the Surfrider Foundation's Plastic Pollution Initiative.

As consumers increasingly rely on delivery services for their meals, the amount of unwanted single-use utensils and condiments are on the rise as well. Food delivery companies have seen increases in orders during the COVID-19 pandemic, as restaurants have been closed for dining in, and customers have been loath to leave their homes. A recent study found that 98% of all U.S. take-out or delivery meals are consumed at home or a workplace, where reusable cutlery is typically available and preferred.

“We appreciate the amplification and expansion of our #CutOutCutlery campaign. This is a very simple solution to a large problem and Plastic-Free July is an ideal time to raise awareness about the damage that seemingly benign plastic cutlery imposes on our planet,” said Sheila Morovati, president and founder of HabitsofWaste.org.

Items often included in take-out deliveries, like plastic utensils and straws, are consistently among the top items found in beach clean ups across the country. These items can harm wildlife if swallowed, before breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces, eventually entering the food chain. Tiny plastic particles known as microplastics have been found in soil, water, fruit, zooplankton, sea mist, and humans. Microplastics have been found in stool samples and a study found that adults are ingesting roughly a credit card's worth of microplastic particles (five grams) each week, with impacts on human health that are not yet well studied.

Plastic production is inextricable from both our climate and environmental justice crises. Plastics are made from a combination of fracked gas and chemicals, and their production and disposal is a major source of global carbon emissions. If plastic production and use grow as currently planned, by 2050, the greenhouse gas emissions from plastic could reach over 56 gigatons—10-13% of the entire remaining carbon budget.

Plastics and fossil fuel manufacturing infrastructure — as well as landfills and incinerators --are overwhelmingly located in communities of color. In fact, data from the U.S. EPA showed that people of color are 79% more likely than white people to live in communities where industrial pollution poses the greatest danger to their health. Poor air quality has been linked to the tragic reality that Latino and African-Americans have been three times as likely to become infected with COVID, and twice as likely to die from it as white Americans.

Reducing our usage of plastics can help address both of these urgent problems, shielding us from the worst impacts of climate change, while improving the health and lives of communities on the front lines of industrial pollution

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