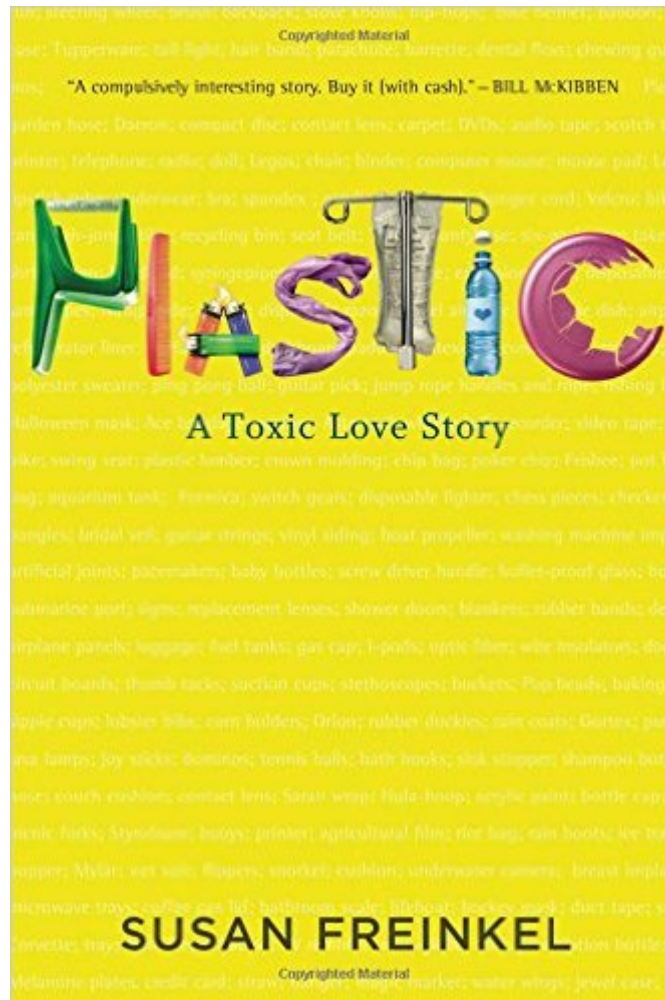


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# Plastic: A Toxic Love Story



## Synopsis

Plastic built the modern world. Where would we be without bike helmets, baggies, toothbrushes, and pacemakers? But a century into our love affair with plastic, we're starting to realize it's not such a healthy relationship. Plastics draw on dwindling fossil fuels, leach harmful chemicals, litter landscapes, and destroy marine life. As journalist Susan Freinkel points out in this engaging and eye-opening book, we're nearing a crisis point. We've produced as much plastic in the past decade as we did in the entire twentieth century. We're drowning in the stuff, and we need to start making some hard choices. Freinkel gives us the tools we need with a blend of lively anecdotes and analysis. She combs through scientific studies and economic data, reporting from China and across the United States to assess the real impact of plastic on our lives. She tells her story through eight familiar plastic objects: comb, chair, Frisbee, IV bag, disposable lighter, grocery bag, soda bottle, and credit card. Her conclusion: we cannot stay on our plastic-paved path. And we don't have to. Plastic points the way toward a new creative partnership with the material we love to hate but can't seem to live without.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a plastic distributor, I like to read books about the history of plastics. As a Colorado resident, and husband to a professional conservationist, I enjoy learning more about environmental issues. I got a chance to do both when I when I recently read the new book, Plastic; A Toxic Love Story by Susan Freinkel. The author decided to spend a day without touching anything plastic. But she didn't make it

too far. About 10 seconds, she estimates...since both the light switch and the toilet seat in the bathroom were made of plastic. So she changed the experiment into a list-making exercise and that day she wrote down 196 different plastic items that she touched. Of course, many of these items were non-durable items like plastic packaging. The next day she continued list-making with a similar tally of everything she touched that wasn't at least partially made of plastic. The non-plastic list only made it to 102 items. This led to some reflection and a list of questions, which she attempts to answer in the book. Those questions include: What is plastic? Where does plastic come from? How did we get so many plastic items in our lives without really trying? What happens to plastics after we put them into a recycling bin? Does plastic actually get recycled after it's picked up curbside? How much of the plastic that the typical American discards is ending up in the ocean? Should we stop using plastic shopping bags? Is there a future for plastic in a sustainable world?

Around 150 years ago, the elephants of the world were being hunted to extinction. The reason? The need for high-quality ivory needed to make billiard balls for that gentleman's game. The rising price of ivory threatened the entire industry, and in 1863 a billiard ball supplier offered a reward of \$10,000 in gold (equivalent to about \$175,000 at today's prices) to anyone who could come up with a good substitute. A printer by the name of John Wesley Hyatt took up the challenge, and started experimenting with nitrating various materials. What he came up with was nitrocellulose, a tough, flexible material that his creative brother named Celluloid. Celluloid proved a boon not only to billiard ball makers (and not incidentally, to elephants) but also to hawksbill tortoises. They were also threatened, their sturdy shells being the raw material for the sort of elegant combs that respectable women of the day wore in their hair- if they could afford them. Celluloid combs, mirrors, and other feminine accessories quickly flooded the market. Celluloid collars for men's shirts quickly displaced expensive linen ones. The era of synthetic materials had begun. The second generation of synthetics came around 1907, with the accidental discovery of what was to become the first of the thermosetting plastics: Bakelite. Invented as a synthetic replacement for shellac in electrical insulation, Bakelite's toughness and ease of molding quickly found a home in telephone sets, radio cabinets, pipe stems, kitchenware and more. It could easily be tinted with the new synthetic dyes, producing the brilliant plastic Catalin radio sets of the 1930s.

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