

2021

Plastic Crisis in the Mountains

The Himalayan Cleanup



INTEGRATED
MOUNTAIN
INITIATIVE

ZeroWaste
HIMALAYA

Plastic Waste: A Crisis in the mountains

Globally, there is increasing acknowledgement about the plastic waste crisis, and that it is being driven largely by unsustainable production systems that have shifted to excessive and unnecessary single use plastic usage.

6.3 of **8.3**

Billion Metric
Tonnes

Billion Metric
Tonnes

became plastic waste.
*(‘Production, use, and fate of all
plastics ever made’
R Geyer et al July 2017)*

Half of the plastic ever manufactured has been produced in the past 15 years (*What a Waste, World Bank 2018*) Half of all plastic produced is designed to be used only once — and then thrown away. (*Our planet is drowning in plastic pollution—it’s time for change - UNEP 2018*)

A deeper crisis of microplastics formed by breakdown of plastics, is also unfolding. Found in rain, water, soil, salt, plants, faeces and even human placenta, micro-plastic is all pervasive and a serious threat to human and planetary wellbeing. Plastic pollution, especially that of marine plastic pollution and the impact on marine ecosystems, has had extensive coverage.

The mountains are not free of plastic pollution and there is a need to bring focus to the mountain waste crisis. Mountains have their own specific challenges which are not reflected in policies or implementation pathways.

Mountain Challenges:

Drastic change in waste profile single use plastics / multi layered plastics non recyclable & increased volumes of waste.

Geographical challenges of access, linkage and limited land availability, higher costs.

One way traffic for plastics - waste just goes up and accumulates.

Ecologically fragile landscape not recognised by waste policies and support needed for the mountains not forthcoming.

False solutions like incineration or burning of waste, bio-plastics being strongly promoted.



The Himalayan Cleanup:

The Himalayan Cleanup brings focus on the waste crisis in the Indian Himalayan Region. The Himalaya has long been portrayed as sacred, pristine and untouched has a flipside of plastic clogged waterways, waste being rolled down hill sides, forests and fields or burnt openly.

The Waste Audit and Brand Audit conducted as part of The Himalayan Cleanup help to understand what are the most trashed items and who are the most polluting companies for the mountains who need to take responsibility for their waste. The audits inform waste managers for evidence based strategies and for the participant, insights to one's consumption patterns for more sustainable choices.

Since 2018, THC has been a yearly event conducted by Integrated Mountain Initiative and Zero Waste Himalaya.

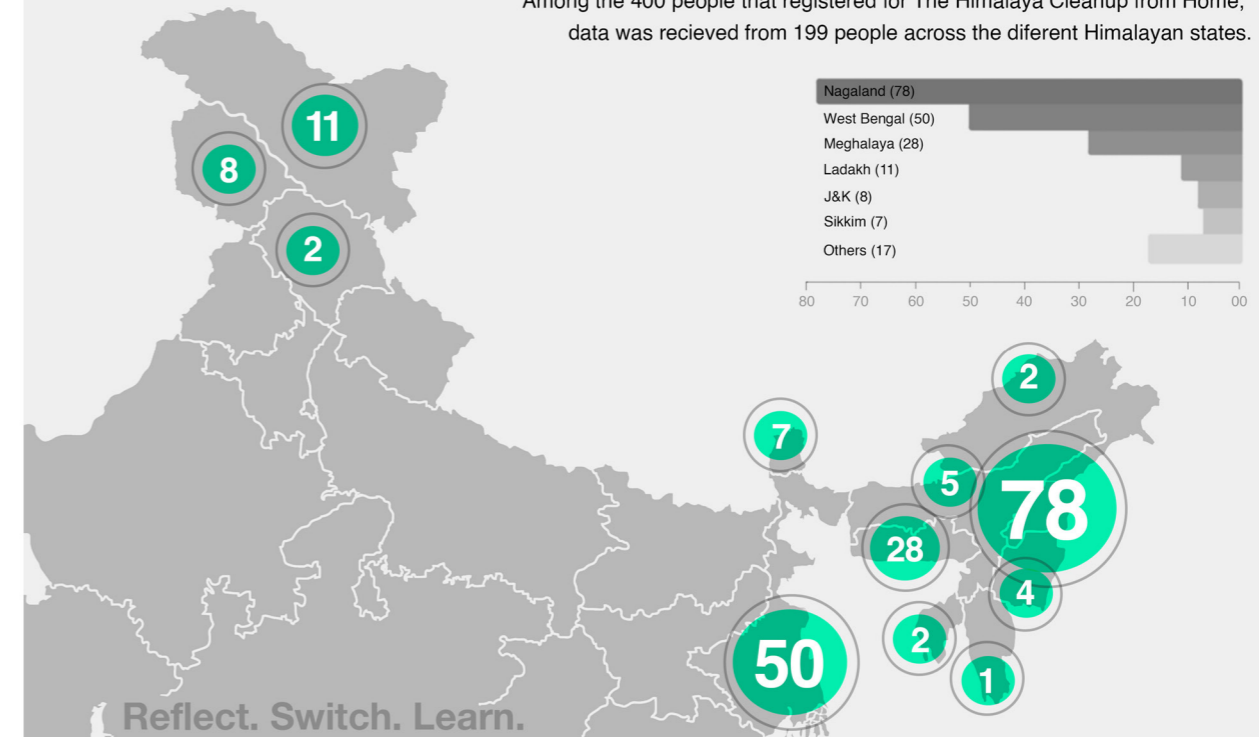
In 2021, THC was conducted at an individual level through home- based audits giving insights to lockdown consumption patterns.



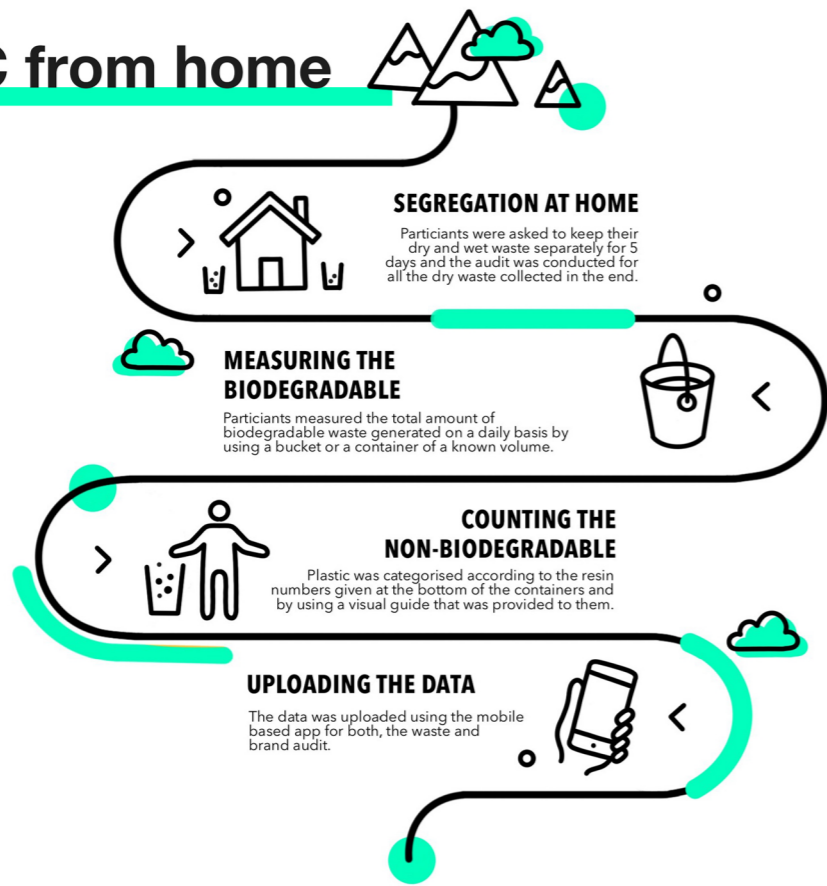
A state wise analysis could not be conducted because of unequal representation of the states. Waste collected would be mainly domestic waste and more skewed towards food waste and influenced by COVID-19 lockdown.

2021 The Himalayan Cleanup from Home

Among the 400 people that registered for The Himalaya Cleanup from Home, data was received from 199 people across the different Himalayan states.

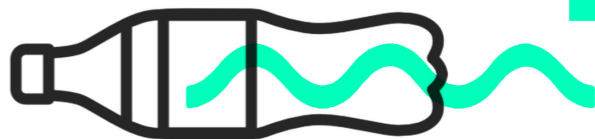


THC from home

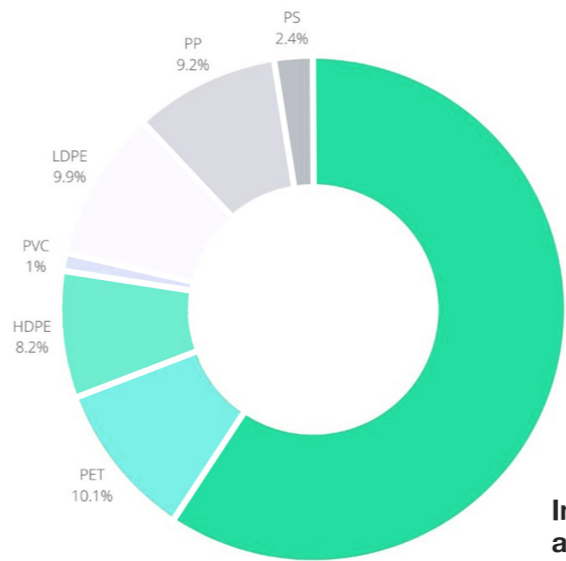


THC findings:

85



per cent of household waste was Plastic,

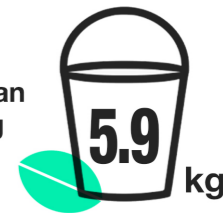


out of the

7,888

pieces of the non-biodegradable waste collected by participants.

In terms of biodegradable waste, on an average households generated 5.9 kg of waste in the 5 days of the audit.



Recyclable & Non-Recyclable plastic

in a household.



High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE)

Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE)

Polyethylene (PET)

Polypropylene (PP)

Polystyrene (PS) (Styrofoam)

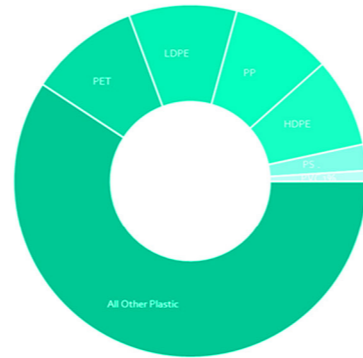
Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)

Among the plastic waste the percentage of recyclable plastics was only 28 as compared to 72 per cent non-recyclable plastics.

28%

72%

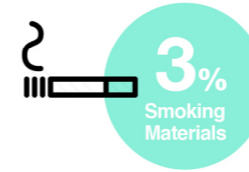
All other plastic (65%)
 PET (12%)
 LDPE (9%)
 HDPE (7%)
 PP (5%)
 PVC (1%)
 PS (0%)



Waste Categories:

Data on the type of waste items were recorded by the participants during THC survey 2021.

Food Packaging comprised the highest percentage of the total waste.



The top polluting brands of THC 2021:



Hindustan Unilever, Nestle, PepsiCo India, Asian Thai Foods, Choudary Groups of Foods, Hindustan Coca Cola, Parley, GCMFM(Amul), ITC and Parle Agro

These are mostly food and personal care products, and multi-layered plastics.

Tackling the Plastic Crisis

The plastic crisis has to be urgently tackled at multiple levels.

Producer Responsibility

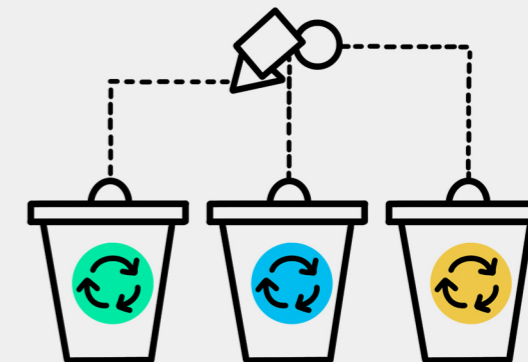
- Turn off the tap on plastics- Reduce plastic production
- Switch to refillables / Reusables/ Design out waste
- Companies to devise support for waste managers in mountain states.

Governments / Local bodies' Responsibility

- Evolve Policy regulations / By laws
- No to single use
- Segregation at source
- Support alternatives to single use plastic
- Promote Local Markets
- Advocate for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) viable to the mountain states. Invest in behaviour change. Appropriate resource allocation. Reflective of the rich biodiversity, ecological sensitivity and fragility.

Communities /Individuals

- From Use and throw to mindful lifestyle
- Reduce waste
- Compost and grow food
- Support local, healthy unpackaged
- Spread awareness
- Demand better systems and systemic changes



About Integrated Mountain Initiative



Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) is a civil society led network platform with the mission to mainstream concerns of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) and its people in the development dialogue of India. It functions as a platform to integrate the knowledge and experiences of multiple stakeholders working across the IHR, and uses this to inform and influence policy at the national and state level. Addressing waste in the IHR is a critical pillar for the IMI. IMI has been anchoring the Himalayan Cleanup as well engaging in policy dialogues on EPR and waste management strategies in the mountains.

About Zero Waste Himalaya



Zero Waste Himalaya is a pan Himalayan civil society platform promoting zero waste principles and actions since 2011 and 8 August commemorates the Bir Declaration of August 2010 that started it all. Zero Waste actively engages in awareness campaigns with a wide range of stakeholders and runs a successful Peer Educator Programme. ZWH advocates for a mountain lens in waste management policies that is based on sustainability and calls for systemic changes that design out waste from the Himalaya.