

The Beauty of Sustainability

It's not new news that plastic is a major problem, it overpowers article feeds on every media platform and news channel. After World War II, plastic gained popularity and became mass-produced. 91% of that isn't recycled¹. That's 8 million pieces of plastic entering our oceans every day. Plastic is easy and cheap to make; a good way for make-up brands to increase profit margins.

Stage make-up, covering a pimple or making a full-face, make-up has a variety of uses. There are millions of tutorials online where people show off their innovative skills, instruct new users and review countless products. As moral consumers, we ask whether the products are safe for skin or tested on animals, but how often do we consider the plastic in our cosmetics? [Britannica](#)



Fig 1. Taken from

We want our make-up to be sterile, and much like in medical practices, this means everything is covered in plastic. A standard lipstick sits in a plastic tube, held in a plastic display within a box that a thin sheet of plastic surrounds. Interviewee Sophie says 'I think that having all the plastic gives people more confidence because it's more hygienic.' And apart from the lipstick itself, everything is thrown away immediately. This packaging becomes part of the ever-growing landfill issue which mainly stems from the overconsumption of make-up products that occurs over time.

Brands are constantly working to create products that are better than their competitors. When something new comes out they promise that it'll work better than anything else; it will make us feel and look better so we excitedly purchase it. However as we find the products we shove aside and the ones we reach for, products begin to accumulate. Alongside that, it's easy to collect different shades, metallics and glitters of eyeshadow or lipstick to show off our creativity. This unused make-up will eventually expire and need throwing out into landfill as well.

[Recycle.co.nz](#)² says that the 'Annual amount of waste disposed to landfills will almost double within 10 years in Auckland alone. This is a staggering increase from 1.6 million tonnes of waste to 3.2 million tonnes of waste that Aucklanders currently throw away,' and of this, 'approximately 252,000 tonnes of plastic waste is disposed of to NZ landfills each year (based on 8% of 3.156 million tonnes of waste to landfill).' This statistic doesn't even begin to cover the amount of landfill waste worldwide. Decaying landfill waste releases toxins and greenhouse-gases into the atmosphere which affects global warming, climate-change and the ozone layer.

¹ [A Whopping 91 Percent of Plastic Isn't Recycled](#)

² [Recycle.co.nz](#)

Alongside this, several cosmetic products contain microbeads - plastics under 5mm that don't degrade.³ Brands include microbeads to smooth out the consistency, create a gentle exfoliator, or to fill the product out. Not to mention the small slivers of plastic glitter in anything shimmery or metallic. According to the *Condor Ferry*⁴ plastic fact page 'Products containing microbeads can release 100,000 tiny beads with just one squeeze.' Most of these are constructed as wash off products, so



these beads wash down the drain into our waterways and seas. Data from *The Ocean Cleanup*⁵ claims that '1.15 to 2.41 million metric tonnes of plastic are entering the ocean each year,' and it's theorized to keep increasing from there. Microbeads store and release toxins which can cause major harm to marine life if consumed. This can also pose a threat to humans as it can make its way up the food chain.

Fig 2. Taken from [Utopia.org](https://www.utopia.org/)

There are several easy solutions to this issue. Consuming sustainably is as easy as buying to need and recycling packaging if possible. My friend Alyse said 'I'm going to make sure I use up all my makeup before it's expired because it will help me and the environment. And I'll make sure I'll recycle all the plastic if I can.' Boxes and plastic components can easily be put in the recycling bin, but there are also other options. For example, 'Wands for wildlife'⁶ is a company that distributes old mascara wands to rescue centres for grooming animals. Claire says 'I reuse the mascara brushes to brush my eyebrows and baby-hairs.' It is also important to buy products without microplastics such as glitters that won't biodegrade if washed off into the sink.

Zero waste make-up is also popular, but it needs to be more than another trend. Many beauty youtubers have followed their routine for a short time completely without plastic and there's no doubt it's a harder routine to follow. Of course they challenged themselves for the entertainment aspect; often creating their own make-up. They make their own lip-balm or deodorant and put them in reusable jars. But it doesn't have to be that hard; many companies eliminate the plastic aspect for you. For example, *No.8 Essentials*⁷ and *Ethique*⁸ use cardboard packaging for deodorants and lip balms which can be recycled afterwards. Teesha, who I interviewed, says 'I have a lip-balm and it's made of really tough card on the outside and if its



³ [Microbeads: Hidden Plastics in Cosmetics \(+ What We Can Do About It\)](#)

⁴ [100+ Plastic in the Ocean Statistics & Facts \(2020-2021\)](#)

⁵ [The Ocean Cleanup](#)

⁶ [Wands for Wildlife](#)

⁷ [No.8 Essentials](#)

⁸ [Ethique - Conscious & Concentrated Solid Beauty Bars](#)

finished you push up the bottom and I can refill it and make more lip-balm.’
Taken from [Ethique.com](https://ethique.com)

Fig. 3

Vintage makeup is another example; returning back to our roots isn't always a step backwards. Our ancestors made themselves up without any plastic at all. 2004 brand *Bésame*⁹ makes vintage cosmetics that focus on the classic, sustainable ingredients and packaging of the past. Their website says, 'We're constantly evolving to offer more refillable and low waste products.' One of their products is 'mascara cake,' a block of mascara that comes in a tin. It can be refilled and is bacteria resistant. Likewise, their multi-purpose cream rouge for adding colour to lips and cheeks also comes in a tin.

You don't have to completely eliminate make-up from your life; it's easy to make sustainable choices when there are so many available options. Saying that, don't rush to throw out all your make-up containing plastic, make sure to use it all before putting it in the recycling. Making these good choices will make you, and the environment, look gorgeous.

Emilia Parker
Aged 16 years 10 months
Individual Submission (from Lynfield College)

Interviewed Participants Sophie, Teesha, Alyse and Claire all consent to their quotes being used in this article and are peers of mine from school.

⁹ [Besame Cosmetics: Bésame Cosmetics | Luxury Vintage Makeup](https://besamecosmetics.com/)