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Eliminating Use of Plastic Bags is First Step in Cleaning Up Oceans

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In an interview with EFE, Coleman, the coordinator of the Surfrider Foundation, a non-profit organization devoted to the protection and enjoyment of the world's oceans and beaches, said that the campaign to reduce plastic bag use is effective because it starts at the individual level and extends to the national scene.

"Reducing plastic bag (use) is the first step, it's something big that can be started by a single person, a family, a group of friends. Each one of those people represents 360 fewer plastic bags per year in the environment," the American activist said.

He called plastic a "modern invention" that is everywhere and is used – or "consumed" – in just 15 minutes, after which it is thrown away but remains in the environment for decades, and that is the importance of changing the mentality of people so that they use reusable bags and bottles.

Coleman is in Costa Rica as an invited guest of the UN Development Program to push for sustainable efforts within the framework of World Environment Day on June 5.

His experience with the Hawaii plastic bag ban was successful, although there are some exceptions, such as the use of plastic bags for vegetables, for laundry or for trash.

He said, the initiative can make a difference, given that changing recycling habits in different countries can be complicated because public policies are needed and because reducing plastic bag use starts with each person's individual decision.

Coleman said that the pollution caused by plastic bags affects tourists, the environment, marine life, the economy and human health.

"Plastic doesn't degrade naturally, but breaks down into pieces and that allows fish to be able to eat it, meaning

that when you fish for that animal, you have a pile of toxins and chemicals that we're going to wind up eating ourselves," he said.

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