

Oxo-Biodegradable Plastics Association

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EU reg. no. 186937011291 - 26



Bio-plastics - no better for marine animals than conventional plastic

You don't have to be a genius to realise that ingesting plastic is not going to be good for any living creature, and whether or not we have the data to prove it, I doubt that any sensible person would think that plastic in the stomach of any animal is a good thing. With estimates ranging from 8 – 10 million tonnes of plastic finding its way into the world's oceans every year, it is likely that more and more marine animals are going to be affected.

It was therefore no surprise to read on the Ocean Crusader's website (<http://oceancrusaders.org/>) that bio-based (sometimes called hydro or compostable) bags fared little better in the gastro intestinal tract of turtles than conventional plastic. Compostable or bio-based plastic is designed to be disposed of in industrial composting units where high temperatures can be achieved, not in the open environment on land or sea and definitely not the GITs of living things.

Our love affair with plastic is stronger than ever, given the fact that there is still nothing as lightweight, strong, flexible and waterproof. Let's face it there is nothing to match it when it comes to packaging and protecting our goods and transporting them home from the shops. Of course we need to educate consumers not to drop litter, and be more rigorous in collection and recycling, but we also need to be smarter in the type of plastic we use.

Oxo-biodegradable or (controlled-life) plastic is totally different from bio-based or "compostable" plastic and offers a smarter alternative to conventional or bio-based plastic. Oxo-biodegradable plastic is made from polymers such as Polyethylene and Polypropylene, but it contains an extra ingredient - a metal salt (not a heavy metal) which acts as a catalyst to break down the polymer chains until it is no longer a plastic and has become a food-source for microorganisms on land or sea.

Oxo-biodegradable plastic is tested according to international standards, ASTM D6954, BS8472 and AFNOR AC T51-808 to confirm that it degrades and biodegrades in the open environment in a much shorter timescale than conventional or bio-based plastic and that it is not toxic.

The purpose of controlled-life plastic is that if it escapes collection and ends up in the open environment, it will degrade and biodegrade in the same way as a leaf only quicker, and leaving nothing behind, no toxic residues or fragments of plastic. It is therefore far less able to accumulate on land or sea. Less plastic on land, means less plastic finding its way into the world's oceans, and any plastic which does get into the sea will not float around for decades.

Several countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East have legislated to make oxo-biodegradable plastic mandatory, because it can be made in existing plastic factories with existing workforce and machinery at little or no extra cost - and it can be made right now. So what are we waiting for?

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