

UN PLASTICS CONFERENCE

The collapse of the UN Plastics Treaty talks in Geneva reflects the deep divide between political rhetoric and practical solutions. However, it should not be seen as a failure - but as a wake-up call. The NGOs and some of the less-developed countries were arguing for restrictions on plastic production, and the plastics industry and the oil-producing countries were opposing them. Both have a legitimate voice, but they are **both missing the main point.**

The problem with plastic, which has attracted so much public concern, is that after it has been used it can get into the open environment and lie or float around for decades, and eventually fragment into microplastics. The key issue (which was not even considered at the conference) is how to change the composition of the plastic itself so that it does not do this.

We should stop talking about bans versus business-as-usual - instead we need to focus on technologies and policies that actually solve the problem. The traditional policies of “reduce, re-use, recycle,” are clearly not adequate, and you cannot fit into a circular economy the plastic which has escaped into the environment as litter. For the same reason, the type of plastic which has to be collected and taken to a composting plant is not helpful.

The only way to deal with this problem is to use technology such as Symphony’s d2w to manufacture the plastic so that it will quickly biodegrade if it gets into the open environment without leaving microplastics behind. This can be done at little or no extra cost, and without changing suppliers. – yes it really does work, and the technology is already compulsory in the Middle East.

Of course, waste-management and consumer-behaviour needs to be improved, and nobody wishes to encourage the improper disposal of plastic as litter, but if this were not happening on a massive scale, we would not be seeing global public concern about plastic. D2w is a fail-safe mechanism in case all else fails.

D2w is a carefully balanced set of ingredients which are introduced in the form of a masterbatch into virgin or recycled polymer when the bag or other polymer product is being manufactured. During the intended lifespan of the product the active ingredient lies dormant, and the product performs in the same way as normal plastic, and can be recycled if collected.

However, if it gets into the open environment after its useful life, the active ingredient speeds up the process of oxidation, and the polymer is converted into a material with a low molecular-weight which is biodegradable. It is then no longer a plastic so it cannot leave microplastics behind. The approximate timescale for conversion can be set, by adjusting the formulation of the masterbatch as required.

The world cannot ban its way out of the plastics challenge. We need innovation, infrastructure, and global cooperation to manage plastic waste responsibly while preserving the benefits that plastics bring to modern life. Oil is not extracted from the ground to make plastic. It is extracted to make fuel, and plastic is made from a by-product of the refining process, so it makes sense to use this by-product to make plastic. Also, plastic has a better Life-cycle Assessment than many other materials used for packaging, such as paper, metal, and glass. See <https://www.biodeg.org/subjects-of-interest/life-cycle-assessments/>

The Geneva talks fell apart because they were trying to legislate against a material instead of a problem - mismanaged plastic waste. If negotiators return to the table, they should focus on solutions that combine environmental protection with economic practicality, so we can make real progress.

Plastics have become the environmental villain — but the real enemy is pollution. The answer isn't to erase plastics from the planet, it's to make them smarter, safer, and better managed.

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