

Position Paper

Plastics Europe position on microplastics for the Internationally Legally Binding Instrument to end Plastic Pollution

Plastics Europe supports the goal to end plastic pollution by 2040 through a circular economy, where all plastic applications are reused, recycled, and responsibly managed during and after use. The prevention of waste leakage to the environment will play an additional crucial role also in preventing the formation of microplastics.

As part of a preventative approach to plastics leaking into the environment, industry has developed Operation Clean Sweep® (OCS), a global voluntary industry programme which has been designed to prevent pellet losses in the plastics value chain. This programme is being implemented by thousands of companies worldwide, and specifically in Europe since June 2023 (and more recently also in US) the plastics value chain has launched a certification scheme for OCS implementation to independently verify the commitment to the OCS programme.

Building on these voluntary efforts, we recommend including a zero-pellet loss objective in the International Legally Binding Instrument to end Plastic Pollution (ILBI-PP). This objective should be accompanied by globally consistent minimum requirements for standards across the plastics value chain and among all actors handling or using plastics pellets; as well as global guidelines based on the Operation Clean Sweep® programme, and a regional implementation such as the OCS Europe Certification Scheme. This will allow countries and regions to set their own measures taking into account national circumstances.

Moving beyond preventing pellet loss, Plastics Europe highlights that although microplastics may be a commonly used term, microplastics only have dimensions in common. The term microplastics encompasses particles originating from a wide variety of different sources and with differing characteristics. Consequently, Plastics Europe supports the development of common terminology at a global level, helping the identification of the different categories of microplastics as a first step; thus, creating ground for discussion and policymaking to tackle microplastic pollution. Supporting to end plastic pollution by 2040 means that the complexity and differentiation within the field of microplastics must be taken into account to find efficient and effective solutions to address specific microplastic emission sources.

In addition, Plastics Europe is collaborating closely with scientists to better understand how microplastics are formed and the impact of microplastics on the environment and health. We are collaborating closely with policymakers and regulators to introduce measures to help mitigate their release for example through a five-year, fully independent scientific research project, engaging world-renowned microplastic experts – the Brigid project. Brigid is part of the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA) MARII initiative of global industry supported research on the impact of microplastics. The global plastics agreement should further boost such research initiatives.

The current version of the draft ILBI-PP does not properly reflect the complexity of different types of microplastics, their uses and sources. Plastics Europe calls for development of globally harmonised terminology reflecting this complexity. We believe such terminology can act as the basis for tailored and ambitious actions to prevent release from the identified microplastic sources as part of the COP process.

Please contact:

Plastics Europe
Dr. Katharina Schlegel
Circularity Director
+32 (0)2 792 30 99

connect@plasticseurope.org

November 2024
