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PRESS RELEASE

REVISED 25 June 2019, Brussels

Flexible Polyethylene Recycling in Europe: Accelerating the Transition Towards Circular Economy

Plastics Recyclers Europe published a paper identifying the prerequisites for increasing recycling of flexible polyethylene into a high-quality raw material while ensuring a sustainable and cost-effective process.

With the converters' demand of around 9 million tonnes¹, LLDPE/LDPE is the second biggest resin processed in the EU and consequently demonstrates a high recycling potential. However, today's recycling rate of this resin is at the level of around 20%. This is caused by the fact that reaching for higher targets and higher quality of the recycled material from this stream is hampered by a number of challenges that need to be overcome in order to reach beyond the low hanging fruit.

"Plastic film waste is still perceived as a demanding and difficult stream to treat, however, we in Europe have proven that even stretch film recycling is possible. Nonetheless, to reach for the additional quantities from post-consumer packaging we need a strong commitment of the value chain to work towards making this material fully sustainable", said Ton Emans, Plastics Recyclers Europe, President.

The main bottlenecks specified in the paper refer to low collection rates & low quality of input materials, lack of design for recycling as well as the continuous development of the recycling technologies. Firstly, harmonized collection and sorting processes at the EU level must be introduced to increase both the quantity and the quality of the collected waste.

Secondly, design of plastic packaging controls to a large extent the degree to which packaging can be recycled, as structures and materials which are incompatible with mechanical recycling cause a number of disruptions in a recycling line.

Therefore, specific design for recycling guidelines must be followed when manufacturing a product and when introducing any kind of innovation on the market.

Lastly, although the advancements in recycling and sorting technologies have greatly improved in the past years more investments as well as research & development is needed to continuously enhance the quality of recycled material.

The industry's effort will have to be further strengthened by an adequate legislative framework that will create conditions for further expansion. The Member States and regions will equally have to thoroughly implement the EU legislation.

The new legislative measures introduced by the reviewed Waste Package, the Plastics Strategy and the Single Use Directive oblige the industry to take immediate and decisive steps in production and waste management of plastics packaging. It is indispensable to investigate ways of increasing the collection rates, increasing the quality of waste as well as diverting and evaluating the potential the material that is currently either landfilled or incinerated. The new targets can be achieved only if the main bottlenecks are undertaken and solutions for them elaborated. Working towards safe, light and functional packaging while ensuring its recyclability at the end of its life is a must. This work needs to be geared towards advancing the recycling of flexible packaging to further improve the environmental credentials and the global sustainability of flexible packaging.



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About

Plastics Recyclers Europe (PRE) is an organization representing the voice of the European plastics recyclers who reprocess plastic waste into high-quality material destined for the production of new articles. Recyclers are important facilitators of the circularity of plastics and the transition towards the circular economy.

Plastics recycling in Europe is a rapidly growing sector representing €3bn in turnover, 6.6 mt of installed recycling capacity, 500 companies and 18.000 employees.

www.plasticsrecyclers.eu

ⁱ Plastics the facts - Analysis of European plastics production, demand and waste data. Plastics Europe. 2018.