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RECYCLABILITY OF PLASTICS PRODUCTS

Working Group Recommendations

Johannesburg, 7 November 2017. Plastics|SA, the umbrella organisation for the South African plastics industry, is happy to announce that the working group has made excellent progress with regards to the recyclability of plastic products. Under difficult and often strenuous conditions the members met to debate complex and far reaching issues.

The working group included representatives from Plastics SA, Sustainability Retailers Forum, Plastics Recyclers Organisation (SAPRO) and Plastic Converters Association (PCA).

Members had one common goal and that was to find suitable and workable solutions that will assist and benefit the environment, the consumer and will create jobs through increased levels of plastic recycling that will find their way in recycled plastic products.

These recommendations provide us with a clear path moving forward and guidance for processes that require detailed implementation plans that need to be developed. It became clear from the working group activities that similar forums need to be created where various stakeholders can meet and engage on relevant topics.

The Working Group concluded their work on 28 September 2017 and during this meeting confirmed general agreement on the following recommendations. The recommendations deal with the recyclability of plastic products and should not be seen, as sometimes reported on, as targeting only plastic bags.

- ***It is recommended that the quantity of fillers be limited in terms of the initial extrusion and moulding materials where the density of the material does not exceed the SG target of <1.***

This recommendation will guide the product specification discussions between retailers and their converters/suppliers of plastic products. The amount of filler, if any, will vary depending on the product

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and the type of plastic raw material used in the production process. These discussions has already started between Retailers and the converters.

- ***It is recommended that the provisions of ISO 14021:2016 Environmental labels and declaration - self declared environmental claims (Type II environmental labeling) be adopted as an industry voluntary standard to convey the recyclability status of a product.***

Discussions have initiated a review of the current information on labels and the message print on plastic products to ensure that the correct recyclability status of the product is communicated to the consumer in a clear and simple message. The need also exists to clearly and correctly indicate the polymer identification codes on the product itself to assist collectors, sorters and recyclers in correctly identifying raw materials – this will assist in the sorting of products into homogeneous polymer types for recycling.

A number of training sessions are scheduled with retailers to provide knowledge and skills in the implementation of The Design for Recyclability Guidelines developed by Packaging SA. These sessions will assist in the design of products with the focus on end of life solution/application and the environmental label and messages.

- ***It is recommended that concerned bodies participate in consumer education and “recycling activities” that are paired with the proposed labeling standards.***

Education and creating awareness on the need to recycle and the benefits thereof are ongoing. It is however, important to ensure that this education starts at grassroots level in schools, and is also aimed at consumers of all ages. Littering is a human behavioral issue and we need to find ways to empower and equip people to do the right thing for the environment.

Recyclable packaging and the recycling of single-use packaging alone is not going to rid our beautiful land of litter. Human interaction with used packaging needs to be addressed at all levels. Packaging can only be recycled if captured in waste collection, formal or informal.

Current programs and initiatives need to be expanded and education and awareness creation need to be stepped up. These activities will be linked up with proposed Government initiatives such as “Billy Bin”.

The development of new markets and the drive to increase the demand for recycled content will also need attention.

- ***The recycling processors to adopt standard/s similar to ISO 15270 for their quality of materials, both incoming and output.***

Currently more than 74% of our waste collected for recycling is post-consumer waste and is collected on landfills. The materials are very contaminated and are often not correctly sorted. All of this has an impact on the quality of the recycled material. More needs to be done to improve the quality of recycled material and to stimulate the demand for recycle.

- ***Waste management companies should invest in advanced processing plants for the separation of waste, geographically distributed to fit the available waste.***

This is a very complex long term activity and might require substantial investment. More work needs to be done and it requires broader consultation and liaison with local government structures. Separation at source is a vital component of the value chain.

The activities of the working group were unique in the sense that, for the first time, various role-players in the broader value chain, sat around a table to discuss packaging problems. These discussions were not always easy as the various role-players were affected differently, but they remained committed to finding workable solutions to the common issues.

The industry remains committed to reducing the amount of plastic waste that lands up in the environment and in the oceans. Plastic waste remains a valuable resource and in line with the circular economy principles must be collected for recycling and re-used in a durable product.

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