

Environmentally friendly plastic: Commission welcomes voluntary industry commitment

Plastic bags, cups, plant pots, wraps... we all use polymer-based products every day. Certain polymers are biodegradable and compostable, though you can't tell by looking at them. Encouraged by the European Commission, a consortium of manufacturers has now voluntarily committed themselves to using environment-friendly polymers in the packaging sector and thereby guaranteeing an efficient biodegradability standard for their products. If successful, this initiative might also stimulate other sectors to undertake similar action.

Vice-President Günter Verheugen stated: "I warmly welcome this commitment. We are actively encouraging such initiatives by the private sector. They are an alternative to "hard" legislation is a central element of the Commission's zeal to regulate in a better and simpler way."

The Environmental Agreement (EA) in the form of a unilateral self-commitment by industry ensures the keeping of an internationally recognised standard for the biodegradation of polymers, produced from both, renewable or fossil resources. In this area there are currently no legislative actions planned by the Commission. The unilateral self-commitment therefore represents a voluntary pro-active measure by the industry concerned and can yield the following benefits:

- encourage the development and use of new polymers thereby fostering innovation and competitiveness
- open up new avenues for waste management and recycling
- improve soil and water quality through high quality compost
- create additional sources of income for farmers.

Since the EA includes also a certification and labelling scheme, users and consumers of products made from such polymers will have certainty concerning their environmental qualities.

The industry sector with the largest consumption of biodegradable plastics is the packaging sector (food containers, wraps, nets, foams) and the sector producing plastic bags for the collection and composting of food waste and as supermarket carrier bags (38% of total consumption).

The manufacturers committed to this EA are key players in the biodegradable plastics market: BASF (Germany), Cargill Dow (USA), Novamont (Italy), Rodenburg Biopolymers (Netherlands). Between them these companies represent over 90% of the European market for biodegradable plastics and have a similar share of the current global market. The self-commitment will be managed by the International Biodegradable Polymers Association & Working Groups, IBAW.

More information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/environment/index_home/emantool_indic_prodel_vappr/polymer.htm