

Plastic waste in the environment

Plastic waste in the environment is harmful to people and nature. That is why we have to collect plastic products after they have been used and return them to the production cycle. A functioning waste management strategy also serves to save on new resources, replace fossil raw materials, and contribute to climate protection.

Collecting and disposing of plastic waste

Plastics serve a variety of functions: for example, they protect food products from deterioration when they are used in packaging. However, they present a problem for the environment when they become waste. Waste often ends up in the environment due to poorly functioning disposal systems or a complete lack thereof. That is why waste management systems must be developed and rolled out on a global scale, much like the global UN agreement on marine litter currently under consideration. By continuing to raise awareness, we can help to ensure that waste is disposed of in the environment in a responsible manner.

Exporting plastic waste leads to problems in the countries that import the waste if it is not processed in an environmentally sound manner, but rather disposed of illegally in the environment. We must therefore ensure that waste is only exported to countries where appropriate recycling capabilities

exist - but also to countries where such capabilities are also properly enforced.

Waste management as a comprehensive solution

Functioning disposal systems not only contribute to less plastic waste in the environment, but they are also a basic requirement for recycling or for recirculating plastics by other means. It is crucial that relevant technologies undergo further development if waste management strategies are to prove successful. This includes creating modern sorting facilities, designing recyclable products, and coming up with new recycling methods.

Chemical recycling presents a promising solution for recycling in particular. Up to now, plastic waste has mostly been recycled as a means of producing energy. The reason being: the limits of mechanical methods have been reached in the recycling of mixed and contaminated plastic waste. While incineration does generate electricity and heat, the raw material that could be used for new products is lost during incineration and CO₂ is emitted in the process. Chemical recycling acts as a supplemental aid here by breaking the waste down into basic elements from which virgin-quality recyclates are made.

The VCI is calling for the following

● Promoting sustainable disposal methods on a global scale with a UN agreement

Negotiations are under way for a UN agreement on marine litter. This must result in the development and rolling out of waste systems on a global scale as well as the promotion of innovative technologies for waste management.

● Better control of how plastic waste is exported

Exports to countries outside the EU and OECD must be banned if such countries fail to demonstrate that their regulations concerning environmental conservation and health and safety practices in the workplace comply with those that exist inside the EU, and in so doing fail to demonstrate that they can recycle plastic waste properly.

● Promoting waste management

We need to consider the broader context when developing and rolling out waste management strategies on a global scale: it is not just a case of disposing of waste properly, it's primarily a case of conserving resources and protecting the climate. That is why new processes, such as chemical recycling, should be recognised and bolstered as a meaningful supplement. Further, we must put a stop to the land filling of all recyclable waste in the EU by 2030 at the latest as a means of increasing the amount of waste made available for recycling.