PlasticsEurope
Association of Plastics Manufacturers

Plastic waste is a resource!

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- **Improving waste management will lead to growth, energy savings and more jobs**
  By end of 2015, the European Commission will propose a revised "Circular Economy" Package which will include new EU waste targets, including new recycling targets for plastic packaging. However, the Commission also wants to include other aspects into the debate, including product design. We encourage policy makers to focus on improving waste management first since this has the largest potential for increased growth, energy savings and more jobs in Europe.

- **There is an optimum level for plastics recycling**
  The amount of plastics that can be recycled has increased in the last decades due to improved collection systems, more efficient identification and sorting technology as well as an increase in consumer consciousness thanks to awareness-raising campaigns. Today's recycling technology ("mechanical recycling") works well for products which are easy to collect and to sort, e.g. commercial film and rigid packaging, PET and HDPE bottles. While future technologies will further increase this potential, plastics recycling today has limitations due to its economic and environmental impacts. According to a recent study, the optimum level for Austria currently lies between 35% and 50%. The optimum for the other Member states will depend on the quality of the collection and sorting system and the available recycling and energy-from-waste capacities.

- **Plastic waste which cannot be recycled eco-efficiently can be a valuable source of energy**
  Increasing recycling rates beyond the optimum level will result in higher costs for society and more low quality recyclates (since these achieve higher yields at a far lower cost compared to higher quality recyclates), with only little ecological benefits. A better way of managing plastic waste which cannot be sustainably recycled would be to send it to efficient energy-from-waste facilities to produce electricity, heat or fuel for the production of cement etc. – thereby saving fossil fuels.

- **Robust analysis needed before setting long-term recycling targets**
  Before setting ambitious recycling targets for 2025 or beyond, especially for plastic packaging, the European Commission should assess the achievements in 2020, based on a single calculation method and using input into the recycling process as the measurement point. Only this will allow a meaningful comparison between Member States, establish a level-playing-field for all actors on the market, and enable policy-makers to set realistic targets based on the best performing countries.

Key recommendations:

1. **Stop landfilling recyclable and other recoverable waste by 2025**
   The upcoming review of the EU Landfill Directive gives policy-makers the opportunity to restrict the landfilling of recyclable and other recoverable waste, including plastics, by 2025.

2. **Set ambitious but realistic recycling targets for plastic packaging**
   Bringing all 28 EU Member States to the current level of plastic packaging recycling of the best performing larger Member State (around 45%) by 2020 would be an ambitious but realistic goal. The calculation should be based on input into the recycling process after all prior sorting has taken place. Later targets should be set following an assessment in 2020.

3. **Ensure that waste treatment follows sustainability criteria**
   In order to make *Zero Plastics to Landfill by 2025* a reality, the waste hierarchy should remain flexible so that the most eco-efficient treatment option, including efficient energy-from-waste, can be chosen.

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