

PRESS RELEASE

Commission's SAM report confirms role of biodegradable plastics within a circular economy

Berlin, 17 December 2020 – This week the European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) published a report, entitled "Biodegradability of plastics in the open environment". The report identifies applications of biodegradable polymers which contribute towards achieving a circular economy and tackle the challenge of managing the EU's waste.

"We are pleased to see that this report clearly identifies several beneficial application areas for biodegradable plastics even though this was not its original focus", says Hasso von Pogrell, Managing Director of European Bioplastics (EUBP). "We also welcome the call for economic incentives to promote appropriate disposal behaviour as well as the need for further research that it highlights", he adds.

Von Pogrell further comments: "The SAM report emphasises the advantages of applications from biodegradable plastics 'where it is challenging to remove or collect a particular plastic product or its fragments from the environment after use'. Mulch films made from conventional plastics, for example, are widely used in European agriculture. The challenge of plastic accumulation in soil can be tackled with the soil-biodegradable alternative."

EUBP was pleased to note that the report also highlights the benefits of biodegradable plastic products "where it is difficult to separate plastic from organic material that is destined for a composting waste stream or wastewater treatment". Packaging highly contaminated with food scraps, cannot be mechanically recycled and will be incinerated or, even worse, landfilled. By using industrial compostable packaging, this contaminated waste fraction will not get lost as it can be included in the organic recycling stream. Additionally, it has been proven in several studies that industrially compostable biowaste bags significantly increase the capture rate of biowaste. However, EUBP agrees with the study authors that "the potential benefits of biodegradable plastics will only be realised if the formulation of the product is appropriate to the receiving environment, and if any potential for the item or its fragments to escape to a receiving environment in which it biodegrades more slowly, is minimised". It is also important to highlight the report's statement for an effective waste management infrastructure to assure proper management of biodegradable and compostable plastics.

"Industrially compostable plastics will become increasingly relevant in this context, as the EU's objective of diverting organic waste from landfill by end of 2023 approaches", adds the Managing Director of EUBP.

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The report is an important first step in considering scientific evidence on the biodegradability of certain plastics in the open environment. It also makes clear that a successful reduction of plastic waste and achieving a circular economy, requires ongoing efforts by all parts of the value chain, also including consumers, and national and regional authorities. “If we are to realise the full potential of biodegradable plastics, the EU must put in place supportive measures to improve labelling, uphold and periodically review certification and standards, and facilitate communication on waste management. Consumers are seeking out sustainability more and more. However, they need to be helped with the challenges of delivering a circular economy through more effective waste prevention, recycling and management measures including through organic recycling. European Bioplastics stands ready to support in this endeavour”, concludes Hasso von Pogrell.

European Bioplastics:

European Bioplastics represents the interests of the European bioplastics industry. Its members include companies from the entire value chain. The members produce, process and distribute plastics that are made from renewable raw materials, are biodegradable or combine both properties. Further information can be found at: www.european-bioplastics.org.

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