

## Effective waste and resource management to beat plastic pollution

Global plastic production has risen rapidly over the last half century, from 2 million tonnes per annum in the 1950s to over 400 million tonnes now and is expected to continue to rise. Plastics do not spontaneously decompose into other compounds, which of course is one of the main advantages of plastics in use, but also results in the accumulation of plastics in the environment. Fillers and additives used in plastics might be hazardous or harmful to human health and the environment. If not managed correctly, at end of life their innate stability turns them into persistent pollution in marine and terrestrial environments as well as causing disruptions to civil engineering infrastructures, such as sewage systems and drainage gullies. Furthermore, as most plastics are produced from crude oil, open burning and uncontrolled incineration of plastics are a source of fossil greenhouse gas emissions, that are harmful to the environment and to human health.



Promoting  
Sustainable  
Waste  
Management  
Worldwide and  
a Transition  
to a Circular  
Economy

In the context of the resumed Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2), to be held from 28 February to 2 March, a Resolution to negotiate a new legally binding global agreement to address pollution from plastics is on the agenda.

ISWA, the International Solid Waste Association, is the only international association and the largest global network working in the public interest to promote and develop professional, sustainable waste management and circular economy worldwide.

Thus, **ISWA recognises the need for and supports the endeavour to prepare an international agreement on monitoring, controlling, mitigating and eliminating marine litter and other forms of plastic pollution globally.** This position paper presents the key issues ISWA considers essential when preparing such an agreement.

**Current available data shows that the vast majority of plastic debris and wider plastic pollution occurs due to the absence of appropriate waste and resources management and the lack of waste governance arrangements.** This results in either no systems to collect, recover and safely dispose solid waste items or systems operating without the basic means to protect the environment and public health.

**ISWA estimates that around 5 to 12 million tonnes of plastics reach the sea every year, representing 50% to 80% of the total amount of waste found in coastal areas. Recent estimates indicate that around 50 to 90 million tonnes of plastics are not collected every year** and that 30% of all plastic waste leaking into the ocean come from open dump sites still in operation in different parts of the world.

**ISWA believes that most plastic pollution is preventable through the deployment of waste and resources management infrastructure and services, so that a functional and resource-efficient circular economy can be established.**

**ISWA considers that the mandate for a global international agreement should explicitly cover these core challenges along with the wider underlying challenges that lead to plastic pollution, to **develop effective and efficient solutions based on scientific evidence and within practicable timescales.****

Thus, **the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), an accredited Organization of the UN Environment Programme, calls upon Member States to** include the following key considerations in the future Resolution about Plastic Pollution:

1. **Address the entire waste management challenge - not just for plastics:** Clear mandate to prioritise interventions to address the challenges that affect the whole waste cycle. It is critical that governance, financing, operating and technical gaps are addressed and not just focusing on the specific sub-component of after-use of plastic items. Without concerted and decisive action on these matters, no prevention of plastic pollution at scale and in a reasonable time can be accomplished.
2. **Stop Open Dumping and Open Burning Now:** The two major systemic failures leading to plastic pollution results from the open (uncontrolled and non-engineered) dumping and burning of plastic wastes, as a means of waste disposal. This practice results in massive negative public health risks and environmental degradation and should be eliminated by implementing comprehensive strategies for sustainable waste collection and management.
3. **Create a robust Financing and Governance system:** In order to ensure long term solutions to stop marine plastic pollution it is essential that solid financing instruments, for example waste management fees and extended producer responsibility systems, and effective governance are in place to provide clear and predictable legislative and financial frameworks that will provide stable conditions for daily waste and resource management operations and to catalyse and scale-up the implementation of new and more sustainable and effective solutions.

4. **Adopt a comprehensive approach for the entire lifecycle, with cross-sector collaborative solutions:** The entire life cycle of plastic materials and items should be considered to enable the identification and implementation of effective solutions. To this, materials innovation and product design should be actively linked to the later resource recovery and circular economy stages. Notably, effective resource recovery and circular solutions can only be implemented with closer and enhanced collaboration and information sharing between producers, brand owners, retailers, consumers and the waste and resource management sector, and resource recovery operations, in order to increase materials looping and enable circularity.
  
5. **Raise Official Development Assistance:** Effective action should include mechanisms for suitable allocation/and re-direction of overseas development assistance to waste, resource management and circular economy capacity, infrastructure and governance development needs. For this to happen, the ability of countries and subnational administrations to benefit and implement the mandate should be assessed and enabled.

The waste and resource management sector has a major role to play in improving public health, protecting life on land and below water, promoting responsible consumption and production, supporting sustainable cities and communities and taking climate action. **Therefore, ISWA commits itself to:**

- Work with International agencies, governments, industry, and other organisations to extend the access to adequate waste management systems to all and support the transition to a circular economy, as an effective means to eliminate plastic pollution.
  
- Promote the development of sustainable waste and resource management strategies and plans for public and private institutions considering waste prevention and minimisation, waste collection, recycling, energy recovery and other treatment solutions, with special attention to plastics, to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals set by the 2030 Agenda.
  
- Increase awareness, network for capacity building, disseminate knowledge and experience, contributing to the advancement of public, technical and scientific knowledge on the subject of sustainable waste and resource management and reducing plastic pollution.
  
- Cooperate with cities, municipalities, and other organisations on targeted and tangible actions to tackle plastic pollution.