LEGISLATION AND REGULATION
DEGRADABLE PLASTICS USE

Rationale

Some plastic recyclers have identified technical problems associated with processing, marketing and remanufacture of secondary plastics into which degradable plastics have been introduced. Aware of the technical uncertainties about the introduction of degradable plastics into their recycling systems, plastics recyclers in general have limited or discontinued the purchase of certain secondary plastics streams because those streams may contain degradable plastics.

Degradable plastic products are being marketed as environmentally beneficial products that will reduce solid waste problems associated with the disposal of plastics. However, many of the claims about degradable plastics concerning their rate of degradation, recyclability, and environmental impact have yet to be substantially verified through in-depth and rigorous research, and debate continues as to the validity of such claims.

In a few special cases recycling of a plastic product is unlikely and degradability does provide significant benefits; for example, six-pack rings. However, governments at all levels have introduced or are proposing the introduction of legislation that would require the use of degradable plastics in the manufacture of certain consumer products despite the lack of scientific evidence in their favor.

Policy

The National Recycling Coalition opposes the proliferation of degradable plastics until substantial evidence is presented to demonstrate that these materials will not have a deleterious effect on plastics recycling and will have a positive impact on solid waste disposal systems. The National Recycling Coalition calls for an immediate moratorium on the introduction and passage of legislation at any level of government that would require or support the use of degradable plastics until issues of controversy have been resolved except in special cases noted above.

The National Recycling Coalition supports continued research into the viability of degradable plastics prior to their introduction into the marketplace, and that no such entrance shall take place without a full review of their environmental impacts. The National Recycling Coalition urges the federal government to establish testing standards to verify the safety and performance of these products

Cross-reference: Design for Recycling