

CEMBUREAU POSITION PAPER ON PLASTICS STRATEGY

CEMBUREAU welcomes the European Commission's initiative to develop a dedicated Plastics Strategy in a Circular Economy.

Background

On 16 January 2018, the European Commission published a dedicated Plastics Strategy as part of the Circular Economy package. The cement industry draws on a wide range of waste streams from different industries for use as alternative fuels to replace its primary fuels and therewith reduce its CO₂ emissions. This is called co-processing. Non-recyclable plastics represent the largest share of the alternative fuels used in the cement industry. We believe that co-processing is a key solution in providing a sustainable and efficient way to manage non-recyclable plastic waste and therefore contributes to reducing plastic littering into the environment as well as landfilling and incineration. From an industrial symbiosis perspective, the Plastics Strategy is of interest to the cement industry which fully supports any proposal that aims to protect Europe's resources, be they primary or secondary resources - such as waste.

The Commission's Plastics Strategy indicates that there is currently a low rate of recycling or reuse of plastics with most of it going to landfill or used in incinerators.

Proposal

The cement industry, through its co-processing activity, plays an essential role in the circular economy and contributes to:

- the reduction of plastic leakage and environmental contamination by treating non-recyclable plastic waste.
- the mitigation of CO₂ emissions from the cement production and the reduction of virgin fossil feedstock by reducing the quantity of fossil fuels in cement manufacturing.
- the reduction of new public expenditure as waste is co-processed in an existing cement capacity network.

As the cement industry is able to tackle part of the Plastic waste issue, we believe it is therefore important for policymakers to strongly focus on:

- the need for a ban on landfill of recoverable and recyclable waste.
- the recognition that cement plants can treat different waste streams such as plastics and simultaneously recycle them as material in the manufacturing process of cement and recover them as energy; this co-processing activity reduces the cement industry's recourse to primary raw materials and lowers its CO₂ footprint.

- the specific relevance of this co-processing for plastics as it offers the necessary parameters for a full burnout of non-recyclable plastic waste, while also having a minimal environmental impact. As the plastic waste fuels' components, i.e. the mineral constituents of the ashes are entirely incorporated into the cement clinker, co-processing offers the unique opportunity of a simultaneous energy and material recovery.
- the potential to minimize investment costs in dedicated facilities, which requires a huge capital investment and in which operating costs tend to be higher. Whilst high quality recycling is the preferred option, the combination of material recycling with energy recovery in co-processing is the next best solution that delivers the best overall environmental, social and economic outcome.

Conclusions

The Plastics Strategy must ensure that any plastic waste that has a calorific value which can be recovered as a fuel source is not landfilled. Currently, there are considerable differences in waste management policies across the Member States. Measures on separate collection, sorting and material recovery could most likely be implemented in a cost-effective way in many Member States. CEMBUREAU looks forward to being part of the discussions that will further implement crucial provisions of the Plastics Strategy.