Opinion

Let's end plastic waste

Canada's chemistry industry has pledged to have all plastics packaging recyclable or recoverable by 2030.

Marcelo Lu & Bob Masterson

Environment

Plastic waste reduction has been on the forefront of the federal policy discussion over the last year, from a commitment to reduce the amount of single-use plastics in federal government operations, to Canada leading the development and completion of the G7 Ocean Plastics Charter that was signed by the European Union and five G7 countries in Charlevoix, Que., last summer.

Data from both Canada and around the world clearly shows that plastic waste in our environment is an urgent issue that cannot wait. To make a substantive change in how Canadians reduce, reuse, recycle, and recover plastic waste, action by consumers, industry, and governments needs to go beyond just the symbolic.

Changing consumer behaviour requires collaboration between government and industry to help facilitate a reduction in waste and an increase in recyclability and recovery of plastic waste.

In Canada, industry is already ahead of the curve. Last June, the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada (CIAC) and the Canadian Plastics Industry Association (CPIA) announced ambitious targets to reduce plastic waste in Canada: making sure 100 per cent of plastics packaging is recyclable or recoverable by 2030 and 100 per cent of plastics packaging is reused, recycled, or recovered by 2040. These industry targets will require significant investment across the value chain in new and upgraded infrastructure and improved packaging design. It will also require widespread public participation in recycling and recovery programs along with a change in industrial, commercial, institutional, and consumer behaviours.

Today, CIAC member companies such as BASF are tackling the challenge of reducing plastic waste through pilot projects like ChemCycling. Using the latest technological advancements to turn plastic waste into raw materials for the chemical industry, ChemCycling will allow industry to replace fossil feedstock and produce new products using recycled material.

Last month, a global alliance of companies in the plastics and consumer-goods value chain joined together in the not-for-profit Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW) to announce a US$1-billion commitment to combat global plastic waste. Comprised of nearly 30 companies, AEPW will develop and bring to scale solutions that will minimize and manage plastic waste and promote solutions for used plastics by helping to enable a circular economy.

The federal government has clearly indicated a willingness to drive to zero plastic waste and

A plastic bottle washed up on a beach. The plastics industry in Canada says it aims to have all plastics packaging recyclable or recoverable by 2030 and reused, recycled, or recovered by 2040. *The Hill Times photograph by Kristen Shane*

in the fall economic statement announced additional tools to support industry looking to expand or upgrade machinery. This is an excellent step in supporting industry, as was Canada's championing of the Ocean Plastics Charter. But concrete actions that help both industry and consumers reduce waste and encourage recyclability and recovery will be the deciding factor in whether Canada can meaningfully achieve a zero plastic-waste future

Part of this process will require investment in innovation that is already ongoing. For more than 30 years, Canada's chemistry sector has been a global leader in responsible and sustainable chemical manufacturing. CIAC's UN-recognized sustainability initiative, Responsible Care, was founded in 1985, and today is practised in 67 countries and by 96 of the 100 largest global chemical producers.

Marcelo Lu is president of BASF Canada and chair of the board for the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada (CIAC). Bob Masterson is president and CEO of CIAC.

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