



Plastics and Standards

Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues

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STANDARDS ON PLASTICS

Governments and stakeholders are showing growing interest in standards as part of the solution to reduce plastic pollution. Standards refer to **voluntary instruments** developed by consensus between stakeholders through standards organizations at the national, regional and international level. Over the past decades, standards have been developed on various **environmental aspects of plastics**, including waste management processes, degradability, recyclability, and bioplastics. A number of additional standards are under development within various standards organizations, including ISO, engaging an array of stakeholders, most notably from government and industry, as well as some environmental organizations such as ECOS [1].

Plastics leakage into the environment occurs at every stage of the value chain [2]. Thus, **holistic solutions** are needed to address the issue from the design stage to the end-of-life. This summary presents the potential of standards to contribute to such solutions, as well as the challenges, gaps and recommendations to move forward.

CURRENT EFFORTS AND GAPS

Aside from standards organizations, the **United Nations Environment Programme's** ongoing work includes reviews of standards and ecolabels and support to stakeholders for policy and standards development [3]. Alongside standards, well-crafted **intellectual property** policies can stimulate innovation for a circular plastic economy and foster cooperation to boost access to technologies that can help reduce plastic pollution, such as through WIPO Green platform [4].

Standards can help influence markets toward more sustainable production. However, voluntary standards are limited and need to be combined with ambitious regulatory frameworks. The global nature of the plastics economy also calls for international cooperation on standards [5]. A number of proposals for a **global legally binding agreement** on plastics place standards at their core. For instance, the **Nordic Council** proposed a global framework based on international standards collectively designed by the Parties and integrated into national legislation and action plans [6].

NEXT STEPS

In order to effectively reduce plastic pollution, action from all stakeholders is needed, both in the field of standardization and policymaking. Recommendations include:

- ▶ Harmonize **terminology**, and map equivalent existing standards
- ▶ Further develop standards using a holistic approach to improve **design**, ensure **recyclability** and quality of secondary raw materials, and support the uptake of non-plastic **substitutes** and reuse/refill business models
- ▶ Develop simple, credible and effective **labeling systems**
- ▶ Foster **inclusive** standardization processes through greater information access and participation by developing countries and environmental stakeholders
- ▶ Enforce standards by developing **regulatory measures** and incentive systems
- ▶ Support developing country stakeholders in the **implementation** of standards and regulatory frameworks
- ▶ Create **enabling environment** for innovation in plastics and substitutes
- ▶ Support a global legally binding **agreement** with standards at its core