

Plastic in the Mountains

International Mountain Day 2018

Discussion on how the international and local communities are addressing the problem of plastic pollution, with a particular focus on mountain areas, organized within the framework of the Geneva Environment Network.

INTRODUCTION

Every year, over 300 million tons of plastic are produced, half of which is used to design single-use items such as shopping bags, cups and straws. In recent years, the United Nations Environment Programme and the international community have been emphasizing their efforts to address the problem of plastics in our environment. A Global Partnership on Marine Litter was launched at the Rio+20 Conference in 2012. Various resolutions on the challenges posed by marine plastic debris and microplastics have been adopted at the UN Environment Assemblies in 2014, 2016 and 2017, asking to address such materials at source. Governments, businesses and civil society organizations have been encouraged to make bold commitments to beat plastic pollution. Civil society is pushing for setting a new global convention with a multi-layered governance approach to address plastic pollution.

Occupying around 22 per cent of the planet's land area, mountains play an essential role in supplying water, energy, food and other services to millions of people, and are a fragile ecosystem vulnerable to pollution. Recognizing the importance of pursuing sustainable mountain development, countries adopted mountain-related targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals (6.6, 15.1 and 15.4), and made a space for concrete efforts to protect mountain ecosystems.

The Waste Management Outlook for Mountain Regions, produced by UN Environment and its partners in 2016, provides an introduction to the pollution issues in the mountains. Increasing tourism, agriculture, urban expansion, mining, consumption patterns, and practices of illegal dumping are polluting mountain environments. Furthermore, decomposition rates in the high mountains are much slower than in low-lying environments.

An event discussing how the international and local communities are addressing the problem of plastic pollution, with a particular focus on mountain areas, was organized by

the Geneva Environment Network secretariat on the occasion of the International Mountain Day 2018, at the International Environment House, Geneva.

Welcome and Introduction

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Waste Management Outlook for Mountain Regions: Plastic Pollution and Downstream Impacts

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The International Community Beating Plastic Pollution: Looking Upstream

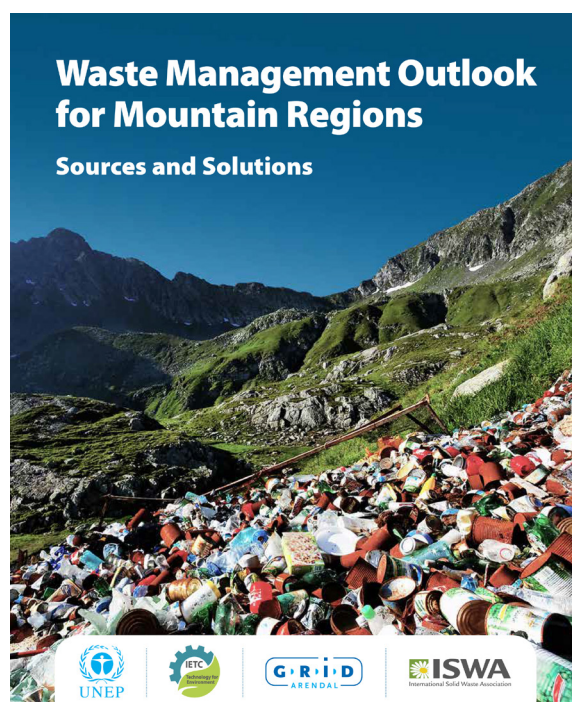
Carlos MARTIN-NOVELLA, Deputy Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions
João SOUSA, Senior Programme Officer, Marine Plastics, IUCN

The Role of the Tourism Sector

Zoritsa UROSEVIC, Geneva Representative, UN World Tourism Organization

Cleaning-up Programmes and Activities

Olivier KRESSMANN, Project Manager, Summit Foundation
Johannah BERNSTEIN, International Environmental Lawyer
Alex LESHCHYNSKY, Section Diablerets, Club Alpin Suisse



KEY FINDINGS

Waste Management Outlook for Mountain Regions: Plastic Pollution and Downstream Impacts

The Waste Management Outlook for Mountain Regions report focused on the issue of waste in the mountains and included a dedicated chapter on plastic in the mountains. These remote ecosystems are sensitive and fragile to pollution, especially with climate change and intensive tourism pressure. The upstream-downstream linkages need to be better explored to tackle the global issue of plastic pollution.

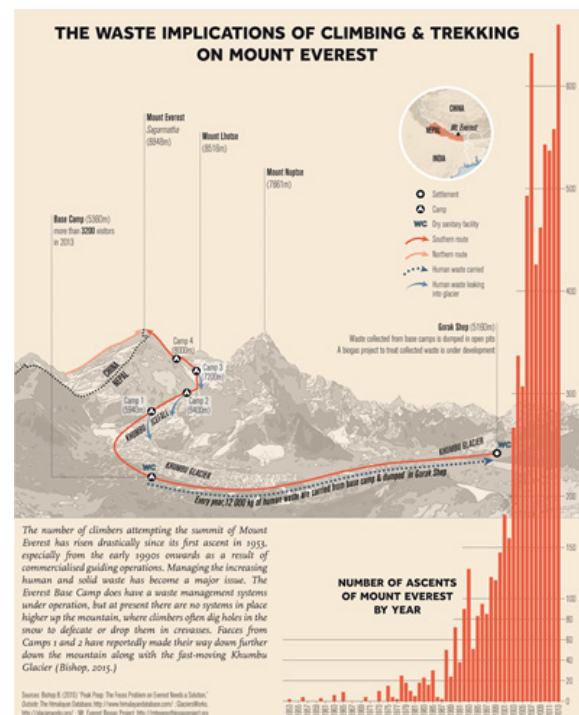


The Outlook identified general challenges:

- Steepness, remoteness, prevailing socioeconomic conditions, and vulnerability to natural hazards, make waste management in mountains more challenging than in lowland areas.
- Gravity and river flow can enlarge the footprint of mountain waste to a thousand kilometers or more downstream, and even right into the ocean.
- Extreme environmental conditions can inhibit waste decomposition.
- High costs of waste collection and removal due to remoteness, rugged terrain and poor infrastructure (fly out system and use of advanced treatment technologies are often not financially viable).

Concerning tourism waste in mountain areas:

- Mountain tourism accounts for 15-20% of the global tourism industry.
- Dramatic expansion in visitor numbers and the amount of waste generated during peak tourist seasons.
- Increasing amount of non-organic waste associated with equipment and supplies.
- Often no sanitation facilities or waste collection services due to remote location mountaineering and trekking areas - mountaineers often leave waste behind, burying it in soil or snow, or dropping it in glacier crevasses.
- High costs of waste collection and removal due to remoteness, rugged terrain and poor infrastructure.
- Inadequate treatment or disposal of waste in mountains creates risks for ecosystems and humans in mountains and downstream regions.



Solutions do exist but monitoring programmes to better understand the situation need to be established.

The International Community Beating Plastic Pollution: Looking Upstream

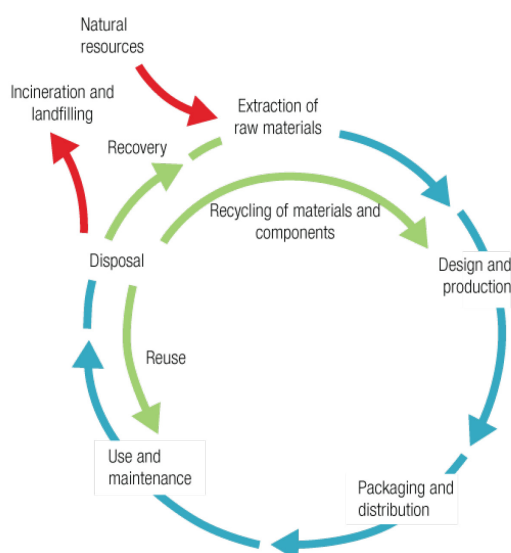
Recent global negotiations and meetings addressing plastic pollution concluded that responses to the problem should be aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is a need to have a holistic and evidence-based approach when addressing plastic pollution, considering the full life-cycle to move to resource-efficient and circular management of plastic, avoiding leakage.

The existing international instruments addressing this problem need to be strengthened and their implementation accelerated.¹

The Chemicals Conventions

With public attention focussing largely on marine plastic litter, a focus upstream on tackling the problem at source is required more than ever before.

The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions Secretariat promotes a Framework for Life Cycle Management as one of the solution to reduce plastic pollution.



*The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions:
A Framework for Life Cycle Management*

The **Basel Convention**² addresses the issues of plastic, listed under "hazardous" and "household" waste.

The Convention offers channels for minimising plastic waste generation at source and promoting their environmentally sound management, as raised in a decision taken at a recent experts' meeting in Geneva proposing a new Partnership on Plastic Wastes under the Basel Convention. This partnership, which could be established by Parties in May next year, would be an international vehicle for public-private cooperation, sharing of best practices, and technical assistance in the area of at-source measures to minimise and more effectively manage plastic waste, thus helping tackle the global environmental problem of plastic litter.

As of 2018, **the Stockholm Convention**³ controls 28 POPs⁴, including those which have been used as additives, flame retardants or plasticizers in plastics (these items still could be found in mountaineering clothing and equipment).

¹ Summary of the second meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics at https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/governance_summary_for_posting_final_with_annex.pdf

² The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal

³ Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants

⁴ Persistent Organic Pollutants

Plastic pollution: not one problem, not one material, not one solution

To better understand the extent of plastic pollution, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has produced several analytical pieces of work and is supporting policy and programmatic action in both the Baltic and the Mediterranean seas.

IUCN's Marine Plastics and Coastal Communities initiative seeks to extend the programmatic approach to the Eastern and Southern Africa and Asia Pacific regions to investigate different sources and pathways of plastic to the ocean.

The Union's past and current initiatives include discussion with packaging companies and developing plastic footprint calculators for the private sector, so companies can acknowledge their plastic footprint, close the plastic tap and increase their revenues.



Most of IUCN's projects are land or ocean-based, but the organization is planning on working on highland ecosystems.

The Role of the Tourism Sector

The vision of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) towards 2030 is a smart, comprehensive and responsible tourism, that will contribute to achieve SDGs.

Through the ONE PLANET - Sustainable Tourism Programme⁵, UNWTO contributes to the common goal: decoupling tourism growth from the increased use of natural resources. It is also the framework under which plastic pollution in the mountains could be looked at.

UNWTO's International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories includes now an observatory in South Tyrol, dealing with mountains issues. The network continually measures the effects of tourism in a particular destination or region. The Tyrol observatory could be used to look at the plastic pollution issue.

UNWTO recently launched "The Tourism for SDGs" (T4SDGs) platform, to make tourism a driver for realizing SDGs.⁶ T4SDGs provides information on sustainable tourism, on the actions that can be done to make a difference and, it gives the opportunity to share researches, events, stories etc. on the topic.



⁵ <http://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sustainable-tourism>

⁶ <http://tourism4sdgs.org/>

Examples of Clean-up Programmes and Activities

Summit Foundation

The Summit Foundation focuses its activities on 3 areas: enhancing awareness and education with respect to the environment; developing practical solutions; and organizing waste collection operations.



Found on the shores of Lake Lemman

Awareness raising campaigns were organized in 80 ski resorts of Switzerland and France, on sport and cultural events, including via the mobile app "Mission Dahu" for ski instructors.



Getting Zero Waste in Verbier

Lemania-Verbier International School has a project involving young students in activities to reduce and minimise the plastic pollution. They are inspired from actions done by other ski resorts around the world (such as measuring the number of waste collected in

the mountains and reducing it by using reusable or compostable cups instead of plastic ones, banning single-use plastic bags).



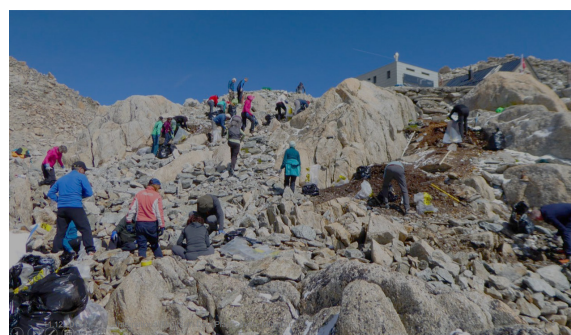
Charlotte & Nicolas

The 'Epic Promise for a Zero Footprint' in Vail, USA, or the Laax greenstyle initiative, are examples of activities that could be implemented in the Verbier area, Switzerland, to achieve the zero waste goal.

Swiss Alpine Club

The Clean Mountains campaign, organized by the Swiss Alpine club, allowed the installation of bags distributors in 50 Swiss Alpine Club huts. The aim of these blue bags, made of 100% recycled plastic, is to encourage people to bring their waste down, but also to collect them if they see them.

■ Clean-ups at SAC mountain huts



Clean-up at the Cabane de Trient, 2018

The Club's further commitments towards clean mountains include clean-ups at huts, awareness raising via communication channels, state-of-the-art energy and sanitation facilities.

EVENT ORGANIZED BY

GENEVA ENVIRONMENT NETWORK

The Geneva Environment Network (GEN) is a cooperative partnership of over 75 environment and sustainable development organizations based at the International Environment House and elsewhere in the Geneva region, including United Nations offices and programmes, non-governmental organizations, local authorities and academic institutions. Set up in 1999, the Geneva Environment Network Secretariat is supported by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment and led by the United Nations Environment Programme. The GEN secretariat organizes and hosts meetings on the environment and sustainable development, such as GEN Roundtables, discussions, briefings and international workshops, promoting the dissemination of information and public awareness of environmental issues. It actively promotes increased cooperation and networking between its members.

www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

The United Nations Environment Programme is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. Its mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

www.unenvironment.org

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

BASEL, ROTTERDAM AND STOCKHOLM CONVENTIONS

The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme are multilateral environmental agreements, which share the common objective of protecting human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes.

www.brsmeas.org

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN)

IUCN is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together. Created in 1948, IUCN has evolved into the world's largest and most diverse environmental network. IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

www.iucn.org

UNITED NATIONS WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION (UNWTO)

UNWTO is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UNWTO promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide.

www.unwto.org

INTERNATIONAL CLIMBING AND MOUNTAINEERING FEDERATION (UIAA)

Founded in 1932, the UIAA is the international federation for climbing and mountaineering. The UIAA represents the interests of over three million climbers and mountaineers from member federations on all six continents. The UIAA has been recognised by the International Olympic Committee since 1995 as the international federation representing mountaineering and climbing. In strengthening its position within the Olympic movement, the UIAA's goal is to ensure ice climbing becomes part of the official Olympic competition programme.

www.theuiaa.org

MOUNTAIN RESEARCH INITIATIVE (MRI)

The Mountain Research Initiative (MRI) is a global research network and coordination organization with over 11,000 members and subscribers worldwide, supported by the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT). Since 2001, MRI has built a strong research legacy that continues to promote global change research in mountain regions across borders and disciplines through connection and collaboration – with a view to supporting pathways towards sustainable mountain development.

www.mountainresearchinitiative.org

SUMMIT FOUNDATION

Created in 2001, the Summit Foundation is an independent not-for-profit Swiss foundation recognized as promoting the public interest. The objective of Summit Foundation is to reduce the environmental impact of human activity in high traffic locations by proposing concrete solutions and awareness-raising methods, both to public bodies and to companies.

www.summit-foundation.org

SWISS ALPINE CLUB

The Swiss Alpine Club is the largest mountaineering club in Switzerland. It was founded in 1863 in Olten and it is now composed of 111 sections with 110,000 members (2006). These include the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club.

www.sac-cas.ch

VERBIER ACTIVITIES: LEMANIA-VERBIER INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, PROJECT GETTING VERBIER TO ZERO WASTE

The Lemania-Verbier International School Project is focused on promoting Zero Waste concept for the city of Verbier among young people, students and local activities. Zero Waste policy has been implementing through the improved recycling, diverting waste from dumps, carbon menus, sourcing local and fair trade ingredients, free drinking water, replacing disposable coffee cups with keep cups, tracking food waste.