

# Plastic pollution, toxicity, chemicals, and potential risks to human health

## Side-event of the Second Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution

Tuesday, 30 May 2023, 13:30 – 14:45

Hall 12, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris

**Co-organizers:** World Health Organization, Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, United Nations Environment Programme, Health and Environment Justice Support, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, groundWorkSouthAfrica, Minderoo Foundation, International Council of Chemical Association, International Pollutants Elimination Network, Association pour l'Intégration et le Développement Durable au Burundi

### Introduction:

Plastics contain thousands of chemicals, including harmful substances such as carcinogens and endocrine disruptors, posing significant risks to human and planetary health. To tackle plastic pollution, a proposed treaty aims to reduce the complexity of plastic products, enhance transparency and traceability, and promote the use of sustainable, non-toxic materials based on rigorous risk assessments and science-based safety criteria.

Identifying the health risks associated with chemicals in plastics is crucial for a global approach to addressing plastic pollution. It is important to ensure an authoritative and unbiased process for identifying these chemicals and developing technical advice. International organizations experienced in assessing the health effects of chemicals can contribute their expertise to this process.

In collaboration, UNEP, BRS, and OECD have compiled critical information on chemicals of concern, their impact on health, governance, and design. The BRS will present a report titled "[Global governance of plastics and associated chemicals](#)" which is funded by Norway. This report highlights the need to address the entire life cycle of plastics, mitigate chemical hazards, and close governance gaps. UNEP will also present a technical report on "[Chemicals in Plastics](#)", developed in partnership with the BRS and funded by Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. See also [Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health](#) and OECD's "[A Chemicals Perspective on Designing with Sustainable Plastics](#)".

Regulating chemicals of concern in plastics and ensuring transparency throughout the plastic life cycle are concerns shared by many Member States. The event will emphasize the importance of legally binding and globally harmonized requirements for chemical transparency and traceability in plastics throughout their entire life cycle. The benefits of such requirements for international trade, human health, workers' rights, and jurisdictional equality will be discussed. Recommendations will be provided for prioritizing certain chemicals or groups of chemicals and establishing mechanisms to communicate chemical information across the supply chain, drawing on existing initiatives and scientific knowledge.

Acknowledging the necessity for transparency, the plastics industry supports initiatives to disclose the use of chemical additives. Efforts are underway to increase transparency across the plastics value chain, including the development of an additive database. Furthermore, the industry is actively working on innovative product designs to promote circularity and reduce risks.

The event will also address the proliferation of plastic products and their adverse impact on the lives and economies of indigenous communities. It will highlight the insufficient attention given by multilateral, bilateral, and private sectors to this issue. Recommendations will be proposed for governments, the international community, private sectors, and indigenous peoples to collaborate and take collective action in addressing this pressing global issue.

# Agenda

Time	Segment	Speakers
13:30-13:35	<b>Welcome and introduction</b>	<b>Moderator:</b> Valentina Sierra (Uruguay)
13:35-13:50	UNEP/BRS report “Chemicals in Plastics - A Technical Report”  BRS report “Global governance of plastics and associated chemicals”	Jacqueline Alvarez (United Nations Environment Programme)  Kei Ohno (Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions)
13:50-14:30	<b>Panel discussion</b>	
	Q 1. Assessing risks to human health and consideration of vulnerable populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Richard Brown (World Health Organization)</li> <li>• Marcus Gover (Minderoo Foundation)</li> </ul>
	Q 2. Addressing transparency and traceability of chemicals in plastics throughout the lifecycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John (Norm) Norman (International Council of Chemical Association)</li> <li>• Olga Speranskaya (Health and Environment Justice Support)</li> </ul>
	Q 3. Possible actions and governance, including criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therese M. Karlsson (International Pollutants Elimination Network)</li> <li>• Severin Sindizera (Association pour l'Integration et le Developpement Durable au Burundi)</li> </ul>
14:30-14:40	<b>Questions and dialogue with participants</b>	
14:40-14:45	<b>Wrap up and closing remarks</b>	<b>Moderator:</b> Valentina Sierra (Uruguay)

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