ISWA
International Solid Waste Association

Key Messages

Issued as a contribution to Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5)

International Solid Waste Association ISWA

Foreword

The International Solid Waste Association (ISWA) has a mission to globally promote and develop sustainable and professional waste management and the transition to a circular economy. As such, ISWA serves as a global advocate and knowledge hub for sustainable practices to guide and support governments, NGOs and private sector actors in implementing sustainable and effective waste management strategies within their areas of responsibility.

In 2022, ISWA stated that the problem of marine litter is directly linked to the lack of sustainable, effective and affordable waste management infrastructure on land, as well as the governance challenges associated with implementing such infrastructure.

ISWA recognised the necessity of actively participating as a stakeholder in the INC process following UNEA 5.2 in Kenya in 2022, when Resolution 5/14, “End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument” was adopted.

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By 2024, municipal waste generation is estimated to rise from 2,1 billion tonnes in 2020 to 3,8 billion tonnes in 2050, of which 1,57 billion tonnes will be openly dumped or burned if no changes occur. ISWA, therefore, emphasises the pressing need to establish integrated sustainable waste management globally, as outlined in the waste management hierarchy, a conceptual framework that prioritises waste management practices from prevention to disposal. These efforts must begin with waste collection for all, particularly for plastic waste.

It is crucial to acknowledge that all waste management processes, including recycling, are sources of pollution and residues. Achieving truly sustainable waste management requires comprehensive monitoring and robust pollution control measures to minimise the negative impact on the environment.

ISWA has been actively present at all negotiation rounds, providing scientific, practical, and evidence-based insights to inform the negotiators in the process of developing the international legally binding instrument. In this final report, ISWA provides decision-makers with five overarching messages for tackling the global waste management challenges, focusing particularly on tackling plastic pollution and its impact on the marine environment.

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About ISWA

ISWA is a global organization representing the entire waste management sector. We serve the sector by providing scientific and practical, evidence-based information to support waste management stakeholders in analysing their needs and making well-funded decisions related to sustainable waste management and circular economy practices. This foundation is critical for establishing practices that are not only effective but also adaptable, affordable, and sustainable in a variety of environmental, social, and economic contexts.

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5 Key Messages and 5 areas of recommendations

ISWA stresses that a comprehensive approach must be taken to end plastic pollution, considering the entire life cycle of plastic!

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Key Message 1. Reduce plastic waste

Ensure equal emphasis is placed on the design, production, consumption, and end-of-life phases within the plastic value chain to reduce the quantity and type of short-lived single-use plastics and those containing chemicals of concern found in products and waste.

- Work to embed the circular economy principle into the design and production process to maximise plastics' durability, reusability, and recyclability.
- Emphasize the promotion of closed-loop recycling systems so that materials can be repurposed or recycled effectively.
- Minimise the release of pollutants and microplastics in plastics recycling processes to avoid further complicating efforts to reduce plastic waste and mitigate associated environmental impacts.

The circular economy principle should guide prioritising and implementing the least polluting and most environmentally friendly waste management practices, as outlined in the waste management hierarchy.

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Justification (statistics, facts)

- About one-third of the plastic produced globally is used for packaging, with the shortest useful lifetime among plastic products.
- Recycling is better than disposal, but there are more environmental, economic, and climate benefits to minimising waste through reduction and prevention.

Recommendation to decision-makers (local, national)

1. Improve the economic and environmental performance of waste management and recycling systems in your cities and regions.
2. Minimise the presence of problematic materials in waste and recycling operations by introducing laws and policies that prefer using environmentally sustainable materials, avoid chemicals of concern, and promote and incentivise reusable alternatives and products.
3. Ban single-use plastics and plastics from being put on the market in your jurisdiction, with an additional focus on avoiding chemicals of concern.
4. Incentivise sustainability by introducing measures that effectively increase the costs of virgin plastic to encourage manufacturers to improve durability, reusability and recyclability.
5. Educate the public about the health risks of certain plastics and chemicals for themselves, their children, their communities, and their countries.

Key Message 2. Ensure collection of all waste, especially plastics

Access to waste management services is a basic human need and right! "Extending waste collection to all" should be a global priority to protect public health and prevent environmental pollution. Introduce financially sound operations to ensure the collection of all waste, especially plastics, recycle as much as it is technically and economically feasible, and charge adequately for the environmental service of disposal.

- Introduce collection of all waste, specifically recyclables, organics (food and green waste), and residues separately.
- Separate collection ensures that plastics from a sustainable and well-functioning waste management system meet market specifications and can be sold to the plastic value chain.
- Recycling, mechanical or chemical, is a materials recovery method that uses recovered plastics as a secondary material resource for manufacturing.
- The lack of adequate collection and waste management systems leads to the release and leakage of plastics into the natural environment, including soils, air (via burning), and water, specifically rivers and oceans.[1]

To collect waste, financing mechanisms are needed, considering capital, operational, and environmental liability costs. They should ideally be based on a cost recovery approach.

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Justification

- Approximately 2.7 billion people lack access to waste collection services.
- 65 percent of the world's plastic waste is discarded into the natural environment.
- In low- and middle-income countries, waste collection rates are usually significantly higher in urban areas due to the housing density, making it affordable for public and private collection services to operate.
- Plastics exist in various polymer types and chemical structures, not all are recyclables. For recyclable plastics, different recycling methods are applied based on the environmental impact, technical viability, and economic feasibility of each approach, whether dealing with specific plastic types or mixed plastic waste streams.

Recommendation

1. Encourage (and adequately finance) waste collection in both urban and rural areas, informal settlements and non-residential sectors. Utilise and improve existing collection systems and infrastructure.
2. Ensure that there is a managed disposal facility where the collected waste can be buried or contained so that it does not "escape" and re-enter the environment through water, air, or land.
3. Promote source separation and closed-loop recycling through effective waste governance instruments to maximise the recycling potential of collected waste and prevent cross-contamination.
4. Establish sustainable financing models for waste collection based on the polluter pays principle, extended producer responsibility, public financing and direct charging mechanisms.

[1] Plastic bags, bottles, food containers and cutlery, and wrappers account for 14 percent, 12 percent, 9 percent and 9 percent of the waste items found in rivers and oceans, respectively.

5. Develop national strategies, plans, and budgets that allow cities and regions to increase waste collection and recycling, especially of plastics, and ensure that the collected materials are safely disposed of or sold to the value chains for recycling.
6. Set international standards for plastic products, including requirements for a minimum content of recycled materials in new products.

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Key Message 3. Upgrade illegal and open dumpsites Ban open burning of waste.

Phasing out uncontrolled disposal and open burning could reduce the amount of plastic entering the oceans by fifty per cent and nearly eliminate Black Carbon emissions and their associated health impacts.

- Safe final disposal refers to engineered landfills with containment measures and pollution control systems, as well as incineration facilities with stringent air pollution controls to minimise environmental impact.
- Open burning and uncontrolled combustion of plastic waste releases Black Carbon, a potent short-lived climate pollutant. Therefore, diverting waste from illegal open dumping and open burning is an urgent and vital step to tackling the challenges of climate change and combating the health impacts.
- In middle- and low-income countries, where open dumping and open burning are the predominant waste management practices, it is crucial to implement measures to divert plastic waste to recycling, safe resource recovery alternatives, and safe final disposal for what cannot be recycled.

Efforts to divert plastic waste from open dumping and open burning must be paired with controlling disposal and providing alternatives that promote recycling, safe material recovery, circular economy principles, and environmentally sound disposal for non-recyclables.

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Justification

- Many open dumps worldwide urgently require attention and action.
- While 25 per cent of global plastic waste is mismanaged, almost 50 per cent ends up in disposal sites, where it may eventually be openly burned, particularly in the Global South.

Recommendation

1. Prioritise effective waste management systems for all waste material streams, especially where existing systems rely on open dumping and open burning of waste.
2. Upgrade open dumpsites and provide environmentally sound alternatives such as engineered landfills. Introduce measures to prevent illegal dumping and open burning.
3. Raise awareness of the environmental and public health impacts of open dumping and burning and the benefits of prevention, reuse, and recycling

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Key Message 4. Increase the role and accountability of extended producer responsibility schemes

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes must be effectively implemented in a more coordinated and comprehensive manner, with an enhanced focus and clear accountability for preventing the leakage into the environment of all types of plastics and products, especially short-lived single-use plastics and those containing chemicals of concern, to the environment.

- EPR can serve as a source of structured financing and an impulse to drive industry-wide change and promote prevention and sustainable management of plastic products.
- By making producers, importers, and brand owners of plastic and plastic-containing products financially liable for the end-of-life management of their products, EPR schemes have the potential to incentivise waste prevention, improve recyclability, and support the collection, sorting, recycling, and disposal of recyclable plastics, while recognizing that the products are distributed internationally.
- An effective EPR scheme makes the producer accountable for the entire value chain. This includes choosing to use plastics in the various products or other packaging materials that have value in the market, incorporating recycled content into the product to stimulate market demand, ensuring product reusability and recyclability, and managing the collection and safe end-of-life processes for non-recyclables.

While EPR schemes have the potential to stimulate improved product design and facilitate recycling, they are hindered by the challenge of managing unbranded plastics. Addressing this issue is crucial for securing adequate financing and effective waste management.

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Justification

- 50 per cent of plastic waste discarded into the environment is unbranded.
- Returnable plastic packaging under EPR schemes can deliver substantial environmental benefits compared to single-use plastic packaging, potentially reducing emissions and water use by 35 – 70 per cent.
- Improving waste management worldwide will require significant investment. By far the most cost-effective solution is to drastically reduce waste and utilise secondary materials as a resource. An EPR scheme could radically reduce plastic waste.

Recommendation

1. Introduce global systems that national governments can join to allow their environmental ministries to track plastic products put on the market effectively to enable country-specific tracking of materials so that governments can monitor and regulate the production and consumption of plastics.
2. Design EPR financing mechanisms for plastic and plastic-containing products that cover the total cost of the waste management value chain, including collection and disposal infrastructure.

3. Encourage producers to expand their collection systems through deposit refund programmes and easily accessible collection points
4. Extend the Producer's Responsibility to eco-design of their products. This ensures durability, reusability, recyclability and the use of recycled content in products while restricting chemicals of concern.
5. Develop regulations and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with these recommendations.

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Key message 5. Provide waste management solutions applicable to socio-economic and cultural conditions

When introducing Waste Management solutions, evaluating their relevance to the socio-economic and cultural contexts, especially in the global south, and advocating for customised, context-specific approaches instead of merely applying models from the Global North.

- Waste Management solutions should consider regional technical capabilities, institutional frameworks, financial constraints, and cultural and social contexts. Interventions should build upon and enhance existing practices across formal and informal sectors.
- International technical and scientific cooperation, including North-South and South-South collaborations, is crucial for capacity building and technology transfer. These collaborations should foster research, drive innovation, and adapt prevention strategies to local conditions by sharing information and best practices.
- Interventions should incorporate financing mechanisms suited to the Global South to ensure sustainability and overcome financial barriers.

Improving waste governance and the availability of valid, reliable and updated data at the national level should be the primary focus for enhancing waste management practices in the Global South, as effective waste governance is essential for achieving sustainable waste management outcomes.

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Justification

- The affordability of waste management services varies widely across income levels.
- Low- and middle-income countries face challenges from inefficient waste collection, rising per capita plastic consumption, and rapid population growth.
- Recyclability depends on local infrastructure, and the informal sector plays a crucial role in waste collection, recycling, and recovery, mainly where formal systems are inadequate.

Recommendation

1. Ensure the sovereignty of the local authorities to choose solutions adapted to their local context, existing collection and infrastructure systems, and involve formal and informal sectors.
2. Involve all relevant stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process and assign responsibilities accordingly.
3. Ensure the availability of suitable financing mechanisms before introducing interventions that are unaffordable to ensure the sustainability of improved systems.
4. Disseminate knowledge on best practices and policies for sustainable plastic consumption and production, as well as the environmentally sound management of plastic waste.