



Power of Lobbying, Paper and Cotton Worse than Plastic

Michael Stephen, an international expert on bioplastics, shares his thoughts and opinion on important issues impacting the bioplastics industry. Today, Michael writes about Power of Lobbying & PR, and Paper & Cotton are worse than Plastic. (This is a Free Article)



THE POWER OF LOBBYING and PR

Is it possible to persuade people that good is bad and bad is good? It seems that the answer is yes in relation to biodegradable plastics.

In Bioplastics News on 9th October <https://bioplasticsnews.com/2020/10/09/anti-oxo-campaign-the-sequel/> the editor published a letter from the BBIA (Bio-based and Biodegradable Industry Association) to its members which had come into his possession, together with a draft letter to the press which the members were being asked to sign. This letter to the press repeated misleading allegations about oxo-biodegradable plastic which had been made and refuted in June in Bioplastics News at <https://bioplasticsnews.com/2020/06/04/battle-biodegradable-oxo-compostable-industry/>

When publishing these letters the editor commented “Some people believe that witch-hunting the oxo industry is going to serve the cause of the compostable plastics industry but I think they’re mistaken and up for a big surprise.”

Witch-hunting the oxo industry is certainly counterproductive. Nobody thinks that the witch-hunters are spending so much money on lobbyists and making so much effort from some altruistic motive to protect the environment. It is obvious that they are trying to use the political process for their own commercial interests. They have a lot of money, so why not use it to damage their competitors, especially when their competitors have a better product than theirs?

It must also be obvious that advancing one bad point after another against the oxo industry, and deliberately ignoring the distinction between oxo-degradable and oxo-biodegradable plastic, is bringing

the BBIA and their clients in the “bio-based” plastic industry into disrepute. For example they say:

“Increasing evidence is showing microplastics entering our food chain through animals, fruits and vegetables. The full health implications of this are yet unknown.” True, but they know perfectly well that these microplastics are coming from ordinary plastics and from their own bio-based plastics and that the European Chemicals Agency are not convinced that microplastics are formed by oxo-biodegradable plastic. In fact oxo-biodegradable plastic was invented to deal with microplastics, not to create them,

They continue “Recycling facilities are unable to differentiate between conventional plastics and these doctored alternatives. This renders recycled plastic useless as it is contaminated with additives designed to degrade it.” They have scored an own-goal here, because PLA plastics will certainly compromise a plastics recycling waste-stream. Oxo-biodegradable plastics will not do so – for the reasons given at <https://www.biodeg.org/recycling-and-waste/>

“This plastic will also find its way into composting and biogas facilities, causing severe financial damage to the sector, and make it harder to produce high quality composts and biofertilisers.” This is most unlikely, because many operators of composting and biogas facilities will not accept plastics of any kind. See <https://www.biodeg.org/oregon-composters-dont-want-compostable-packaging/>

Governments and consumers are waking up to the fact that the decision-making process is being distorted to the commercial advantage of the lobbyists and their clients, and to the disadvantage of the population and the environment. If they are allowed to succeed they will have deprived policymakers of the only way of dealing with plastic waste which has escaped into the environment and cannot be collected for recycling or anything else. The burden of plastic will keep mounting up until there is more plastic in the sea than fish.

Not only are the bio-based industry trying to damage their competitors by their PR and lobbying activities, but as I said in my last column, for many years they have been selling their own products at high prices with deceptive marketing.

Their type of plastic is not in fact compostable, because it does not convert into compost, and is actually required by EN13432, ASTM D6400, and Australian 4736 to convert almost entirely into CO₂ gas. This is a greenhouse gas which does nothing for the soil and cannot possibly be called compost.

Also, it has been decided by the Danish courts that it is deceptive to describe this type of plastic as biodegradable. This is because it is tested to biodegrade in the special conditions found in a composting facility – not in the open environment, where consumers would expect it to biodegrade.

DAILY TELEGRAPH 16.10.20

Single-use plastic bags could be better for the environment than cotton totes reused 50 times, a study has found.

I would agree. COVID has shown that bags need to be made with antimicrobial technology, and plastic is the only material in common use which can be made antimicrobial.

See <https://www.symphonyenvironmental.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Antimicrobial-Optimised.pdf.pdf>

Scientists at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore found that in the country's waste system, the water and energy consumption that goes into cotton and paper bags made them worse for the climate than plastic.

The best option was a long-life plastic bag used at least 50 times, followed by the single-use plastic bag, and a cotton bag used 50 times, said the study, published in the Journal of Cleaner Production.

The authors examined five varieties of bag, concluding that single-use paper bags were the worst option in terms of global warming impact, with reusable plastic the least detrimental.

Switching to paper or cloth from plastic “would increase the environmental footprint resulting in heightened negative effects such as global warming and eco-toxicity potentials,” the study concluded.

The authors said: “Our main message is that reusable plastic bags are the best option, provided that they are reused many times – over 50 times to be precise.

The Daily Telegraph continued “Around the world consumers and policymakers face a complex choice as the carbon footprint of increasingly widespread cotton totes has come under scrutiny. In 2011 an Environment Agency study found that a cotton bag would have to be used 327 times to match the relatively low carbon footprint of the single-use plastic bag.

Cotton also requires huge amounts of water to grow, and cotton farming has contributed to ecological disasters such as the drying up of the Aral Sea in central Asia.”

Michael Stephen

Michael Stephen is a lawyer and was a member of the United Kingdom Parliament, where he served on the Environment Select Committee. When he left Parliament Symphony Environmental Technologies Plc. attracted his attention because of his interest in the environment. He is now Deputy Chairman of Symphony, which is listed on the AIM market of the London Stock Exchange, and is the founder and Chairman of the Oxo-biodegradable Plastics Association.

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