



A SLEDGEHAMMER TO CRACK A NUT

The Hindu on-line paper (21st June 2016) reports that the Kozhikode Corporation are looking to force customers to pay a huge price (currently unspecified) for plastic carrier bags. The Corporation are considering fixing the price for such bags and still working out the detail of how they will monitor the sale of such bags and where the money will go.

However, there is nothing as lightweight, strong, flexible and waterproof as plastic when it comes to protecting food and other goods from damage and contamination and carrying them home from the shops. So, resistance to change is fierce and the resulting enforcement costs do not help the cause or the environment.

The good news is that plastic carrier bags can now be made with new d₂w oxo-biodegradable technology, so that if they get into the environment as litter they will degrade and biodegrade in the same way as a leaf, only quicker and leaving no harmful residues or fragments of plastic.

d₂w bags look the same and perform in exactly the same way, and consumers would not be able to tell the difference during their useful life. Oxo-biodegradable (controlled-life) plastic is conventional polyolefin plastic with an extra ingredient which causes the plastic, to degrade and biodegrade in months rather than years, on land or sea. See www.biodeg.org

The approximate life of the bag or packaging can be set at manufacture, during which time it can be re-used and recycled with other plastic products or incinerated for energy recovery. However, if it escapes collection and ends up in the open environment, it will not lie or float around for decades.

Better still, it can be made in existing plastic factories using the existing workforce machinery and raw materials, at little or no extra cost, thus safeguarding jobs in the plastics industry, and it can be implemented right now.

Oxo-biodegradable plastic is already used by environmentally responsible companies around the world and nine governments in Africa, Asia and the Middle East have made it mandatory. They recognise that either through lack of recycling facilities or collection infrastructure it is not always possible to collect the plastic waste. They have therefore allowed shopkeepers and consumers to keep the best product for the job but have disposed of the environmental baggage associated with it.

The Kozhikode Corporation should impose a lower tax on oxo-biodegradable plastic in order to encourage a shift away from ordinary plastic.

Oxo-biodegradable plastic should not be confused with vegetable-based plastics sometimes known as “bioplastics” or “compostable” plastics. These are up to 400% more expensive and are tested to biodegrade in industrial composting facilities – not in the open environment – so they are not much use in the fight against plastic litter. Also, they do not actually convert into compost, as they are designed to convert rapidly into CO₂ gas. Although marketed as “biobased” they actually contain a high proportion of oil-based material.