

Plastics Colloquium identifies 5 key focus areas for 2021

The 2020 Plastics Colloquium Feedback session was hosted virtually recently by the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF), the Consumer Goods Council of SA, Plastics|SA and the informal sector associations.



Anton Hanekom, executive director of Plastics|SA

Six working groups were each afforded an opportunity to present on the progress they have made against the priorities that were agreed to at the 2019 Plastics Colloquium. Representatives of these working groups offered some insight into the success and challenges being faced with biodegradable and compostable plastics; product standards and certification; product design, development and innovation; integration of the informal waste economy; infrastructure (including SALGA activities); and consumer education and awareness.

'Impressive progress'

“The 2020 Plastics Colloquium Feedback Session was an important step forward for everybody involved in the plastics value chain. It was hugely encouraging to hear about the impressive progress the various working groups have made this past year despite the huge disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic,” said Anton Hanekom, executive director of Plastics|SA.

Hanekom also applauded the commitment made by government and all the other stakeholders to work together to find workable and sustainable solutions to prevent plastic waste from ending up in the environment.

“Achieving our objective of zero plastics in the environment is not something that the plastics industry alone can achieve. Finding a solution to the plastics leaking into the environment and ending up in our rivers, streams and oceans requires teamwork, focus and dedicated effort from everybody involved,” he said.

While he admits that much work still needs to be done before South Africa reaches the implementation phase, Hanekom added that it was encouraging that the various stakeholders and role-players were each willing to take responsibility for a specific section of the plan.



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Key focus areas

The following were identified as key areas requiring attention during 2021:

1. Developing a proper municipal collection system with the necessary infrastructure to deal with the waste collected in neighbourhoods, (i.e., landfills, incineration possibilities for plastics that are difficult to recycle, buy-back centres, etc.)
2. The role of reclaimers in the waste management process, with proper consideration and attention given to their relationship with regards to household waste collection and separation, expanded public work programmes and municipal public employment systems;
3. The role of producers and formalising them into EPR schemes in order to eliminate the “free riders” who do not financially contribute to plastic waste collection and recycling the packaging that enters the local market. Where necessary, certain single-use plastics will need to be phased out and replaced with compostable plastics;
4. Ongoing research by the CSIR to include the use of compostable plastics and waste-to-energy in order to provide decision-makers with a clear understanding of how the system works and ensuring that every decision taken in the future is evidence-based;
5. Building on the work already done by Plastics|SA and the Consumer Goods Council of SA when it comes to educating and informing consumers about the consequences of littering, the importance of recycling and their role in creating a litter-free South Africa.



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'Huge value in plastic waste'

Minister Barbara Creecy set the 2021 Plastics Colloquium as the deadline by when she will be requiring the various working groups to present a possible system, governance model and financing of the plans.

“Plastic waste has huge value and can create much-needed wealth and opportunities for our country if it is managed correctly. The minister acknowledged that the plastics sector is way ahead of many of the other sectors in our country. However, we cannot afford to slow down in our efforts to design a clear road map for ending plastic waste in the environment. To this end, we are working with retailers, brand owners, producers, raw material suppliers and recyclers to unite with us around one vision, one message and one campaign,” Hanekom concludes.