



C A G
Citizen consumer and civic Action Group

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Chemical Contamination of Recycled Plastic Pellets

Theme: How safe is recycled plastic?

Press Release

A study by IPEN (International Pollutants Elimination Network) has revealed that recycled plastics contain chemical toxins that are known to have profound effects on human health. Recycling has for long been promoted as a green, safe solution to handling plastic waste. However, this recent study reveals that the recycling process transfers the toxins in plastic to the recycled plastic; and because recycling typically mixes several types of plastic together, could produce new chemical cocktails in the process.

CAG, as part of a global study conducted by IPEN, collected recycled plastic pellet samples from a recycling facility in Chennai. Samples thus obtained from 23 countries were analysed by IPEN for the presence of 18 substances, representing three types of toxic chemicals: 11 brominated flame retardants, 6 benzotriazole UV stabilizers and bisphenol A (BPA). None of the samples were free from all the targeted chemicals, and 21 samples contained all three types of chemicals. More than half of the samples contained 11 or more chemicals, and 17 samples contained five or more endocrine-disrupting chemicals. A large number of toxic chemicals in many of the samples highlights the need to also consider the potential for combination effects.

Speaking at the webinar, organised by CAG to share the study findings, Vamsi Shankar Kapilavai, Senior Researcher explained that ‘there is so little transparency about the chemicals that go into the production of plastic. The toll this is likely to take on human health is impossible to quantify. We are talking about a substance that pervades every aspect of our lives and leaves a toxic trail behind, as it travels through our ecosystems and our bodies’.

Priti Mahesh, Chief Program Coordinator, ToxicsLink, also speaking at the webinar explained that consumers need to be aware of the hazards of plastic, and make informed decisions to avoid the use of plastic, wherever possible. ‘Meendum manjappai’, a recent initiative by the State Government, has made this message loud and clear.

The toxins from plastic are known to have endocrine disrupting properties and cause cancers; and the toxic load is felt more severely by vulnerable populations such as children. We urgently need an actual reduction in the amount of plastic produced along with a system that encourages redesign and reuse. We need governments to regulate plastic production and companies to invest in new product delivery systems. Equally importantly, we need informed consumers who call for greater transparency and accountability from the government and industry.

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