



NEWS RELEASE

Earth Day, Sustainability and Plastics

Toronto, ON (April 22, 2014) - In the flurry of news reports about Earth Day, you likely will hear quite a bit about how individuals, businesses and governments are focusing on “sustainability.” But did you know that plastics also contribute to sustainability?

From more fuel-efficient cars to minimalist packaging to energy-efficient homes and buildings, innovations in plastics help us do more while leaving a lighter environmental footprint. By enabling advances in global sustainability, modern plastics have profoundly improved the way we live today while helping to preserve more of the Earth’s resources for the future.

The *Intelligent Plastic* campaign is highlighting these advances, especially how plastics make it possible for us to “do more with less”—that means better, more fulfilling lives with less impact on the Earth. And how plastics inspire innovations that improve our lives, solve big problems and help us design a safer, more promising future.

A more promising future is something we all can celebrate on Earth Day.

Advances in sustainability made possible by plastics are evident in every sector of the economy: transportation, health care, packaging, our homes and buildings, sports, children’s toys, even the clothes we wear. So let’s take a brief look at how a couple of major uses of plastics – autos and packaging – contribute to sustainability.

A quick spin through advances in automobiles made possible by plastics

Tough yet lightweight plastic parts allow automakers to do more...with less.

The use of plastics in automobiles is growing dramatically – today’s autos are approximately 10% plastics by weight but approximately 50% by volume. That’s right: half the volume of each auto today, on average, is actually made with plastics: bumpers, door panels, seating, dashboards, carpeting, lighting, more and more parts under the hood. The list grows every year.

These plastics contribute to improved safety and design – and also to light weighting, which helps cars achieve increased fuel efficiency and create fewer emissions. Automakers likely will need to use even more plastics and plastic composites to meet government fuel efficiency standards in the future.

New plastic composites (reinforced with carbon or other fibres) are being developed to be lighter, stronger, and more durable than ever. Unfortunately, making these innovative parts often has been a

slow and expensive process. But recent research could spur innovations that allow faster and cheaper production of carbon fibre reinforced plastic parts.

These parts potentially could be used throughout much of the automobile, contributing even more to light weighting. So automakers (hopefully) could have a better shot at meeting fuel efficiency standards, and Canadians could get even lighter, more fuel-efficient cars. Made possible by plastics.

And wrap up with a few advances in plastic packaging

Thin, lightweight plastic packaging helps protect our food and other products with less material, so we save money by wasting less and we create less packaging waste.

In other words, plastic packaging lets us do more... with less. Specifically by contributing to those three “R” words: reduce, reuse, recycle.

Reduce

Lightweight plastics are used to package more than 50 percent of typical consumer goods – but plastics make up only 17 percent of all packaging by weight. So plastic packaging carries more and creates much less waste than alternatives.

For example, we now routinely can choose food in minimalist, lightweight packaging made with plastics that reduces packaging and waste. And plastic packaging helps our food stay fresher and increases shelf life, so we save money and waste less food.

In addition, making plastic packaging consumes less energy than alternative materials, which results in reduced energy-related emissions. And plastic packaging weighs considerably less than alternatives, which results in less fuel burned during transport.

Reuse

Plastic packaging makes it possible to buy, serve and store more of our favourite foods with less packaging waste. For example, some prepared foods now are available in plastic packaging that keeps food fresh on store shelves, transforms into a convenient serving dish, and re-seals to protect food during storage, creating less waste and clean up. And reusable, durable, airtight plastic containers have become a mainstay of Canadian kitchens – many can go from the freezer to the microwave to the dishwasher over and over again.

Recycle

With increased access to plastics recycling, we now have more opportunities to recycle more plastics and to send less waste to landfills. 95% of Canadians have access to recycling PET and HDPE plastic bottles; 70% to 93% recycling access for other bottles; and, 52% to 93% of Canadians are now able to recycle other non-bottle plastic rigid containers. As well, 61% of Canadians have access to the recycling of plastic bags and other films.

Plastic bags and wraps can be returned for recycling to many participating retail stores.

It's also now easier to find consumer products (e.g., kitchen tools, furniture, decking) made with recycled plastics from used beverage bottles, yogurt containers, milk jugs, or other plastic containers. Recycling more plastic packaging means we bury less valuable material in landfills – and buying recycled content products increases demand for recycled plastics.

Recover

There actually is a fourth “R” – recover. Waste-to-energy facilities generate power by recovering the energy inherent in non-recycled plastics and other materials.

Waste-to-energy is an efficient, cost-effective means to reduce greenhouse emissions and to divert waste from increasingly expensive landfill space. Waste-to-energy produces electricity with less environmental impact than almost any other source of electricity.

Let’s spread the word about how plastics help us in our collective pursuit of sustainability, not just on Earth Day, but everyday.

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Today's intelligent plastics are vital to the modern world. These materials enhance our lifestyles, our economy and the environment. For more information visit www.intelligentplastics.ca.

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