



SANBWA Position Statement:

Biodegradable additives in PET packaging for bottled water

SANBWA currently does NOT support the use of biodegradable additives to the bottled water industry's PET packaging.

Although we welcome further dialogue and are open to technology that would allow integration of these products into the recycling stream, our organisation is currently against the use of oxo-biodegradable additives to PET for three reasons:

- These products result in a negative environmental impact compared to recycling of PET, and are generally regarded as green-washing.
- Using oxo-biodegradable additives will increase South Africa's consumption, and thus importation, of PET, at a cost of some R600 million.
- Using oxo-biodegradable additives will result in job losses.

Using oxo-biodegradable additives implies that the PET bottles must be discarded, and not recycled. Recycling PET is the environmentally friendly path to take, as it uses PET a second or third time, thus reducing consumption of PET. The second time that PET is processed, only about 20% of the energy is needed compared to processing virgin PET. So, recycling also reduces energy consumption, which is a second environmentally friendly action.

Currently about 50 000 tons of PET are recycled in South Africa. Using oxo-biodegradable additives implies this would be discarded in the waste dumps. This tonnage of replacement virgin PET would cost about R575 million of import Rands. Add to this the cost of importing the oxo-biodegradable additives and one gets to about R600 million sent needlessly out of the country.

About 12 000 people are directly or indirectly employed in PET recycling. Remove PET recycling, and you do away with 12 000 jobs. If oxo-biodegradable additives are used, no recycler will want to accept PET bottles for fear that they will contaminate the normal bottles. A recent bread bag saga supports this statement. Our bread bags have oxo-biodegradable additives, and the net result is that recyclers accept no bread bags. This makes the effort environmentally unfriendly.

So, SANBWA does not support oxo-biodegradable additives, as this would be detrimental to the PET recycling industry and to the environment. We will however re-evaluate our position after any further developments and follow advice from the SA Plastics Federation, SAPRO, PETCO and other relevant stakeholders.

Statement prepared by John Weaver, Chairman SANBWA.
Extensive use was made of SAPRO statement 11 March 2009 available from annabe@absamail.co.za