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Microplastics in our meals

Green, Malaysia



● Once seen as an environmental issue, plastic pollution has invaded the human food system and bloodstream, raising serious concerns about long-term health risks.

● The upcoming UN global plastics treaty must go beyond recycling rhetoric to cap virgin fossil-fuel-based plastic production, the actual upstream driver of the crisis.

● The petrochemical industry is expected to promote “advanced recycling” and “circular economy” narratives that divert attention from genuine accountability and hinder systemic change.

which is producing less virgin plastic. The industry will heavily lobby for a treaty language prioritising recycling over reduction.

Promoting alternative feedstocks for plastics, while potentially beneficial in specific niches, raises concerns about scaling these sustainably, particularly in terms of land-use and resource competition.

Crucially, they often do not solve the microplastics problem if not properly managed. This is not a panacea and shouldn’t excuse continued overproduction. Calls for better consumer education will be loud, while resisting producer accountability.

Intense behind-the-scenes lobbying to weaken treaty provisions, particularly production caps and strict design regulations.

Publicly, we should expect glossy campaigns touting industry investments in recycling tech and “circular economy partnerships”, often obscuring the continued massive investment in new virgin plastic production capacity.

The success of the global plastics treaty hinges on one pivotal question: Will it have the courage to address the source – the relentless production of virgin fossil-fuel-based plastic – or will it tinker at the edges of waste management?

SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Like the climate crisis, mitigating plastic pollution requires systemic change that disrupts powerful economic interests.

A treaty that focuses solely on downstream solutions while ignoring the upstream flood of new plastic is doomed to fail. We need ambitious, time-bound caps on virgin plastic production.

We should insist on strong, harmonised global EPR systems making producers financially and operationally responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, including collection, recycling, and safe disposal.

Not to mention significant financial and technological support to help developing nations build waste infrastructure and transition, ensuring the treaty doesn’t become another burden on those least responsible.

The global plastics treaty is our best chance to respond. We must not let the siren song of false solutions drown out the urgent need to turn off the tap. The world must muster the political will to confront the fossil fuel industry’s shift to plastics head-on.

Our health, and the health of the planet we share, depends on it. The time for half-measures and recycling myths is over. It’s time to design a future with less plastic, period.

-@green



BY

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THE tide of plastic pollution, long a blight on beaches and in oceans, has crashed into our very bloodstream.

The latest, chilling revelations of microplastics permeating not just the environment but our food system have transformed an environmental concern into a public health emergency.

This transboundary crisis, carried by wind and water, respects no borders, making the upcoming negotiations for a global plastics treaty arguably one of the most critical diplomatic efforts of our time.

It is science diplomacy in action. Yet, standing squarely in the path of meaningful solutions lies the same behemoth that fuels the climate crisis: the massive fossil fuel industry.

For decades, the narrative focused on waste management – littering, overflowing landfills, and the tragic choking of marine life. These micro particles, some of which are nano, are now found from the deepest ocean trenches to the highest mountain peaks, infiltrating agricultural soil, the air we breathe, and the entire food chain.

While long-term health impacts are still being unravelled, the presence of plastic particles and associated chemical additives within human

tissues raises profound concerns about inflammation, cellular damage, and potential links to chronic diseases.

The sheer volume is staggering. The tonnages run into millions and are growing. Our linear “take-make-dispose” economy, fueled by cheap virgin plastic, is broken. Recycling rates globally are dismal, hampered by complex material mixes, contamination, and often, economic infeasibility.

The upcoming UN negotiations aim to craft a legally binding agreement. The ambition is to end plastic pollution. This requires tackling the problem across its entire lifecycle, which many consider a monumental task.

DELAY TACTICS

The petrochemical industry sees plastics as its lifeline. It has become obvious that many expect their response to the treaty pressure to mirror familiar climate delay tactics.

Doubling down on promoting “advanced recycling” as a silver bullet. While potentially useful for specific waste streams, these technologies are energy-intensive, unproven at scale, costly, and can release harmful emissions.

They distract from the core need,