

GLOBAL PLASTICS AGREEMENT

ISSUE SUMMARY:

The negotiation of a new global, legally binding instrument on plastic pollution is intended to conclude in early December 2024 and **be ready for adoption in 2025**. In early 2025, the Department of State will begin an internal executive branch process to determine whether the United States can/should join the agreement making it one of the first major international environmental policy decisions of the Administration after inauguration. Plastic pollution has been prominently on the agenda of world leaders at the G7, the World Economic Forum, and in the United Nations, in addition to being second only to climate change on the international agenda of environment ministers.

The United States is the largest producer of plastics worldwide and most plastics are made as a by-product of petrochemical production. Domestic scrutiny from industry, NGOs and communities with environmental justice concerns on issues such as bans on certain single-use plastics has taken center stage in the U.S. and other countries. In addition, there has been bipartisan interest in Congress on marine pollution, including marine plastics, which resulted in the passage of Save Our Seas legislation.

UPCOMING MILESTONES:

- 5th and intended final Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5) for a Global, Legally-binding Instrument on Plastic Pollution will be held on November 25- December 1, 2024, Busan, Korea.
- C-175 interagency decision process begins on whether the USG should join the Agreement, TBD early 2025.
- U.N. Diplomatic Conference to Adopt the Agreement, mid 2025.

BACKGROUND:

Because they are both durable and lightweight, plastic products have found prominence in the construction, transportation, and packaging industries and have revolutionized the health care industry. Over the last 20 years, the global annual production of plastic products has more than doubled despite insufficient waste management capacity globally, and as a result, plastic waste has also doubled. In 2019, roughly 23 percent of global plastic waste was either improperly disposed, burned, or leaked into the environment. Plastic products account for approximately 85 percent of total global marine waste and between 70 and 80 percent of all waste that ends up in land and marine environments combined. Images of plastic pollution on beaches, entangling marine mammals and seabirds, have increased public awareness and calls for action. In addition, plastic products in the environment tend to break down over time to form very small pieces called “microplastics” which are found at the cellular level in food such as fish and vegetables and in the human body.

At the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in March 2022, governments agreed to launch negotiations on a global, legally binding instrument on plastic pollution that addresses the full life cycle of plastic, including its production, design, and disposal. The INC is scheduled to complete the development of this instrument at its 5th meeting, scheduled November 25- December 1, 2024. Following conclusion of the negotiations, a Conference of the Plenipotentiaries or “Diplomatic Conference” will take place in 2025 where governments will adopt the treaty. The instrument will then become open for countries to join through a notification or “deposit of ratification, acceptance or approval” made to the United Nations. The Department of State will lead an interagency Circular-175 or C-175 process to obtain approval to conclude negotiations/join the Agreement as early as first quarter 2025.

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

☒ Congress ☒ Industry ☒ States ☒ Tribes ☒ Media ☒ Other Federal Agency
☒ NGO ☒ Local Governments ☐ Other (name of stakeholder) _____

The U.S. posture in the Global Plastics Agreement negotiations has been developed through an extensive interagency process and in active consultation with Congress and domestic stakeholders. The INC process has garnered occasional mainstream media coverage and significant trade press.

MOVING FORWARD:

In December 2024, EPA may need to brief the transition team on action items anticipated in the first quarter of 2025.

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OITA

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: OCSPP, OLEM, OAR, OGC