

# Plastics recycling figures

**Total of 503 600 tons' plastics waste collected – more than half was packaging**

A DETAILED survey into the state of South Africa's plastics recycling industry is conducted annually by Annabé Pretorius of Plastix 911 – an independent consultant who has an unsurpassable knowledge of the industry and has formed a wide network of recyclers with whom she conducts one-on-one interviews.

"The collection, documentation and publication of updated and detailed data regarding the amounts of plastics that were produced, processed and recycled in South Africa, provides us with an important instrument to gauge the growth and development of the industry. To get an accurate assessment, Annabé interviewed the 288 plastic recyclers who were operating in South Africa at the end of 2019," says Anton Hanekom, Plastics|SA's executive director.

During 2019, a total of 503 600 tons of plastics waste was collected for recycling. Of this, more than half (362 800 tons) was packaging – giving South Africa an input recycling rate of 45.7%.

"The amount of plastics we recycled back into raw material was the equivalent of 24 million two-litre milk bottles every

day! Some 244 300 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> was saved – the equivalent emissions of 51 000 cars in the same year. Considering the economic downturn that was experienced, the rising cost of electricity, the impact of load-shedding and other deterring factors, this is still a terrific accomplishment of which we can be proud," Anton adds.

*More than 70% of all the recyclable plastic collected in 2019 came from landfill and other post-consumer sources.*

### Growing acceptance of including recycled plastic in packaging

South Africa's plastics industry continues to be dominated by the packaging industry, which accounts for 49% of the local market. It is encouraging to see the growing number of brand owners who are committed to including recycled content in their packaging. Thanks to this growing end-market, 119 000 tons of recycled plastics were used in 2019 to manufacture new rigid and flexible packaging items. Recycled flexible packaging was the largest market for recyclate, with 24% of all recycled materials finding a market in shopping bags, refuse bags and general flexible packaging.

The recycling of plastic made a direct contribution to South Africa's GDP of

2.3% and an 18.5% contribution to the manufacturing GDP in 2019.

R2,065-billion was injected into the informal sector through the purchasing of recyclable plastics waste. 58,750 income opportunities were created – which include waste pickers and employees of the smaller entrepreneurial collectors.

### Input vs output?

There are various ways in which recycling figures can be analysed. Some researchers prefer 'Input Recycling' – which measures the tonnage of recyclables collected for recycling. Others advocate for using 'Output Recycling' figures, i.e. the actual amount of material that was processed and sold as new raw material, after the recycling process for the purpose of understanding material flow.

"The debate over input vs output is a very old one. Both ways of measuring offer their own advantages and disadvantages. In Europe, they prefer calculating the percentage of collected waste that is sent away for recycling, i.e. Input Recycling. Because we are often compared with Europe, the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) agreed that it makes sense for us to follow the same methodology as our European counterparts when reporting on the recycling rate of plastics, paper, glass and cans," Anton explains.

## Plastic Recycling Figures 2019



SA produced **1.8 %** less plastic products in 2019 (compared to 2018).

**1 841 700** tons of polymer were converted into plastic products.

**Plastics|SA**

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**R 2.065 billion**

was injected into the informal sector through the purchasing of recyclable plastics waste, creating **58 750** income opportunities.

**119 000** tons of quality recycled plastics were used to manufacture new packaging items such as detergent bottles.



Plastics recycling saved **244 300** tons of CO<sub>2</sub> – the equivalent emissions of **51 000** cars in the same year.

