

SANBWA endorses Plastics SA's call for behaviour change to cut plastic waste, boost plastic recycling

The South African National Bottled Water Association (SANBWA) has endorsed Plastics SA's view that only a behaviour change on the part of global citizens will have a significant impact on the amount of plastic in the litter streams.

Plastics SA Executive Director, Anton Hanekom, said: "Over the past 25 years, our position has never changed: Plastics don't litter – people do! Every piece of plastic has value and has the potential to be repurposed and recycled into something new.

"Whilst a battle rages on around the issue of litter in the environment, Plastics SA and its members will continue to make a tangible difference through various clean-up operations such as coordinating South Africa's participation in the International Coastal Clean-Up, Operation Clean-Sweep, river catchment projects and ongoing education campaigns around the country."

He pointed to the fact, that each July, people around the world take part in 'Plastic Free July', an international movement that aims to reduce the amount of plastic waste in the environment by encouraging fellow citizens to make the shift towards long-term, environmentally-friendly habits.

Unfortunately, over the past few years, numerous independent scientific studies have been conducted to compare the environmental footprint of plastics versus other packaging materials, e.g. glass, paper or biodegradable packaging. Time and again, these life cycle analyses have proven

that plastics require less energy, reduce waste and have lower carbon emissions. Most recently, said Hanekom, the CSIR released their findings that confirmed that reusable, plastic shopping bags are the best option for South Africa¹. "After comparing 21 environmental and socio-economic indicators, including water use, land use, global warming, the impacts of pollution, impact on employment and the affordability for consumers, the CSIR confirmed that locally produced plastic shopping bags have the lowest environmental footprint compared to carrier bags made from alternative materials, or even biodegradable bags – provided they that they are re-used.

"Even more compelling is the findings of Danish researchers who found that cotton bags need to be re-used 7 100 times to have the same cumulative environmental impact as using classic plastic bags². For every seven trucks needed to deliver paper shopping bags, for example, only one truck is needed to deliver the same number of plastic shopping bags³, thereby further helping to reduce the environmental footprint and the amount of waste generated," Hanekom said.

"The findings of studies like these mentioned by Anton as well as that recently conducted by the Green Alliance⁴ must be taken seriously," said SANBWA Executive Director, Charlotte Metcalf. "They highlight

that switching to aluminium will generate toxic waste, to glass would generate additional carbon emissions, and to carton will create hundreds of tonnes of low-quality waste.

"The message is clear: don't accept alternatives without considering the proverbial whole picture." Metcalf reiterated Hanekom's key point: "It is also clear that the real issue that needs to be addressed is not the use of plastics, but human behaviour. Every piece of carelessly discarded litter has the potential of ending up in the environment or polluting our oceans. Municipalities that fail to put an effective waste management system in place, not only fail their citizens but jeopardise the health of our planet as they are inviting a waste crisis."

Sources:

1. <https://wasteroadmap.co.za/completed-projects/informing-decisions-on-single-use-plastic-carrier-bags/>
2. <https://mybroadband.co.za/news/science/311379-an-inconvenient-truth-banning-plastic-bags-may-do-more-harm-than-good.html>
3. <https://www.thisisplastics.com/wp-content/uploads/Environmental-Footprint.jpg>
4. <https://www.businessgreen.com/bg/news-analysis/3080124/alternative-materials-no-solution-to-bottled-waters-single-use-plastics-crisis-study-argues>