AFPM recently participated in the fourth session of the United Nations' ("UN") negotiations for a global plastics agreement in Ottawa, Canada (INC-4). AFPM supports the UN's ambition to eliminate additional plastic pollution. To get there, we need to accelerate a circular economy where plastic is sustainably reused or recycled instead of discarded, enabled by a global agreement that unlocks industry innovation and global investment in plastics circularity and waste management. A successful treaty must be ambitious, but implementable, and include essential elements that:

- Recognizes the tremendous societal benefits of plastics, including their essential role in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Unlocks innovations across the plastics value chain to enable a more circular economy; and
- Provides nations flexibility to address unique plastic waste challenges through National Action Plans supplemented by global metrics.

We are encouraged by the progress seen during this round of negotiations and remain hopeful that an agreement will be reached to end plastic pollution while continuing to recognize the tremendous societal benefits of plastics. Here is a progress report from Ottawa:

Extended producer responsibility and financing

EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) programs – programs that assign producers responsibility for end-of-life costs of their products, – continue to be an integral part of negotiations. Negotiators began to reach consensus on EPR and we expect to see the inclusion of EPR provisions in the final agreement. This may include requirements or guidelines for nations to develop an EPR program where producers or importers pay into a fund. The fund would be used to reduce plastic pollution by providing access to waste management and improving the circularity of plastics.

EPR programs can play a valuable role in improving waste management systems if designed properly but must be paired with other actions like improved product design, waste sorting and movement of post-consumer plastics from collection sites to areas with recycling infrastructure to be successful in combating plastic waste and pollution.

Product design

There is also growing alignment around requirements to design plastic products that are more easily recyclable. Details around the application of these requirements are still to be determined but could include guidelines or criteria for design. Product design will be one of the areas of focus of intersessional work to precede the next round of negotiations in November in South Korea (INC-5).

Provisions that enable sustainable product design, encourage the use of recycled content and optimize resources are critical to managing plastic pollution.

Trade provisions

Many nations aligned on addressing trade measures in some form, but further discussion will determine if the agreement focuses on waste only or includes provisions related to the trade of certain chemicals, polymers and plastics. Delegates agree on the need to align with and not duplicate existing international conventions that govern waste trade, like the Basel convention. The Basel Convention is an international agreement that establishes standards for the transboundary movement of hazardous waste, solid waste and municipal incinerator ash, including notice to and written confirmation from the receiving country prior to export. That said the US is currently not a signatory to the Basel Convention.

Consideration of existing conventions and respect for national sovereignty are essential elements for the agreement. Further, the agreement should build on global initiatives that foster circularity and efforts to encourage transparency and information sharing related to chemicals, polymers and additives of plastics currently in commerce.

Intersessional work

Participants agreed to convene two groups to address the following topics ahead of INC-5.

1. Means of implementation and financing
   This group will assess options for the financial framework of the agreement. They will examine its methods and governance structures, identifying and exploring how financial support could be targeted to those nations most in need of assistance both from a financial and technical perspective.
2. Criteria on polymers and chemicals of concern, and product design
   This group will evaluate provisions related to the chemicals used in plastic production. Similarly, this group will evaluate if, and how, the agreement would identify and subsequently address plastic applications that are most likely to result in environmental pollution.

AFPM is committed to working with governments and other stakeholders to help inform a global agreement. Our industry has a wealth of expertise in product innovation and design, and business perspectives that can help find solutions and solve the unique challenges countries face in eliminating plastic pollution.

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About AFPM:

The American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM) is the leading trade association representing the makers of the fuels that keep us moving, the petrochemicals that are the essential building blocks for modern life, and the midstream companies that get our feedstocks and products where they need to go. We make the products that make life better, safer and more sustainable — we make progress.