

# Press Release

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## **Degradable polyethylene bags are a threat to health and environment**

IBAW publishes position paper

Shopping bags made from polyethylene PE, which contain metal based additives to promote the break down of the plastic into very small pieces, have a negative impact on health, plastic recycling and the environment. IBAW, the international industry organisation for bioplastics and biodegradable polymers, has published a position paper, which comments on the many questions raised by so called "degradable" PE products.

Since their first appearance on the market in the 80s many doubts have been expressed as to whether PE Additive products that are claimed to be "oxo-degradable", "biodegradable", sometimes even "compostable", provide what they promise. The latest example of such a misleading marketing concept was the French "Neosac" launched in April. None of these products have yet met the requirements of the European Standard EN 13432, which determines whether a plastic packaging is biodegradable and compostable. While IBAW member companies test and certify their products according to this Standard, manufacturers of "degradable" PE additive products do not. For good reasons: After an initial decomposition – the product brittles into small pieces – the degradation of the remaining PE is very slow, much too slow to meet the criteria of the Standard. The resulting PE dust then could accumulate in nature, where animals and plants might incorporate it. It is well known from scientific studies that especially the marine life suffers from plastic residues.

In the position paper IBAW also points at the metals used as additives, like the carcinogenic Cobalt. During the manufacture of the bags, the high concentration of the metal based additives could damage workers' health. If the bags are trashed or brought to composting the metals may be liberated with the consequence of adding (eco)toxic persistent and bio accumulative substances to the environment.

IBAW criticises that these bags are advertised to solve the littering problem. In fact such a concept might promote littering and endangers organic recovery schemes which are built up to promote sustainability. Even if the bags are collected in plastic recovery schemes, the concept is hardly an innovative and favourable one: The additives will destabilise plastic recyclates of mixed origin, leading to a reduced technical and economical value of recycled plastics.

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*The IBAW is an international association of the bioplastics and biodegradable polymers industry. The association is supported by companies from the agricultural, chemical and plastics industries, scientific institutes and innovative users.*

*Further information is to be found at: [www.ibaw.org](http://www.ibaw.org)*

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A selection of pictures on certified biodegradable plastics products can be ordererd after downloading at:

[http://www.ibaw.org/eng/downloads/IBAW\\_Pressmaterial.pdf](http://www.ibaw.org/eng/downloads/IBAW_Pressmaterial.pdf)

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