

Tackling the plastic crisis: can we scale adequate waste management with USD 200 per tonne of plastic?

New study from South Pole and ETH Zurich explores cost efficiency of existing plastic waste management projects

25 February, 2020 in Zurich, Switzerland – Plastic waste, especially in oceans, is rising up the scale of global environmental concerns. It is against this backdrop that leading sustainability solutions provider **South Pole** and **ETH Zurich**, one of the most prestigious universities in the world, partnered to assess the cost efficiency of and environmental benefits associated with existing projects that are tackling the growing plastic crisis. The analysis focused on projects using approaches such as sanitary landfilling, co-processing in cement kilns recycling, and the introduction of reusable packaging.

The research study shows that the net cost of environmentally friendly plastic waste management projects was between 100 and 2,000 USD per ton of plastic waste¹, with the typical average net cost estimated to be closer to the lower cost range. It follows that the cost of adequately managing a plastic packaging item of a few grams is significantly less than one cent per item. If this cost were covered by plastic polluters, it could enable a more rapid scaling-up of waste management projects.

Other headline findings include:

- Surveyed plastic management projects not only tackle plastic pollution but also reduce GHG emissions, which is an important co-benefit
- Switching from single-use to reusable packaging was found to be cost-effective: in some cases, switching from single-use to reusable packaging allows for the reduction of costs in the supply chain, thereby creating environmental benefits at negative costs
- The study also identified important social co-benefits arising from the projects, for example by giving waste pickers a fair income
- Financing plastic waste management is especially important in regions and / or for plastic waste types that are not yet collected, such as thin-film packaging or plastic waste in remote island communities

*“We want to turn the global plastic crisis into an opportunity to save millions of dollars, safeguard fragile ecosystems, and unleash innovation benefits along the corporate value chain. This is why we are investing in research and initiatives to find the best possible ways to implement smart, market-based solutions that can help effectively address plastic waste,” says **Bastien Girod, South Pole**. “We have an experienced team of experts at South Pole supporting corporates to assess their footprint, reduce it, and finance certified projects that tackle plastic pollution globally.”*

¹ Prevented from being dumped in uncontrolled open dumps, openly burned or disposed of in the environment.



ENDS

Note to editors:

The study explored eight projects using the following approaches and realised in the following locations:

Project Name	Approach	Geography
Legok-Nangka	Sanitary Landfill	Indonesia
Geocycle	Co-processing in cement kiln	India
rePurpose	Co-processing in cement kiln	India
Plastic Bank	Recycling	Philippines
Plastic Collective	Recycling	South China Sea
Algramo	Reusable packaging	Chile
Hepi Circle	Reusable packaging	Indonesia
Trash Hero bottle @hotel	Reusable packaging	Thailand

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About South Pole

South Pole is a leading provider of global climate solutions, with over 300 experts in 18 global offices. The company's expertise covers project and technology finance, data and advisory on sustainability risks and opportunities, as well as the development of environmental commodities such as carbon and renewable energy credits. To date, South Pole has mobilised climate-finance to over 700 projects in emission reduction, renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable land-use. The company is a signatory of the Ellen MacArthur New Plastic Economy and a founding member of the 3R Initiative for Plastics. South Pole assists corporates to go beyond internal actions and support certified projects in "plastic leakage hotspots" that generate verifiable environmental and social benefits. For more information, visit www.southpole.com and follow the company on [LinkedIn](#) & [Twitter](#).