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Chair

Mr. John Aldag

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● (1615)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you so much, witnesses, for your patience. We are expecting there may be another disruption, and so I am going to start.

We have a reduced quorum. There are only four of us at the table right now, but I expect other members will join us.

I understand that we have agreed there will be seven minutes per witness for opening statements.

With that, we'll jump right into it.

Just to let everybody know, I use a card system. I'll give a yellow warning card when you have one minute left. When we get into the questions, it will be the same thing. When your time is up, I'll give the red card. Don't stop mid-sentence. Just finish up your thought, and then we'll move on to the next person. That's how it works for the questions, as well.

We tend to go with our witnesses by video conference while we have the link working.

Perhaps we could start with Love-Ese Chile.

I'll turn it over to you for seven minutes.

Ms. Love-Ese Chile (Researcher and Consultant, Grey to Green Sustainable Solutions, As an Individual): Thank you for the invitation to speak today. I would like to applaud you for being leaders in our national community and making space for this discussion on plastic pollution.

I am Dr. Love-Ese Chile. I'm a researcher and consultant at my company Grey to Green Sustainable Solutions. Over the last seven-plus years I have been building my expertise in sustainable science, green chemistry, biodegradable plastics. My research explores science and develops the technology that will help sustainable plastics circulate within our local economies. In my work as a consultant, I spend a significant amount of time bringing understanding to stakeholders about the role of sustainable plastics. I have worked with non-profits and businesses, and give many public lectures about how we can collectively take steps to reduce plastic waste by making more conscious decisions about plastics.

You have heard many voices in this standing committee, voices that talk about the benefits of plastic use and how they've supported the huge advancement of our society and will continue to support us in the future. You have also heard about the devastating environmental crisis that has been caused by the unfettered discharge of these materials into our ecosystems. We're here today for the solutions. How can we start to turn the tide on plastics? Many groups are here talking about their one piece of the puzzle and wondering how they can all come together to make the whole, but I urge us to think about the problem in the opposite way. What system do we envision, and how can we align these pieces to make it happen?

This is a conversation I often have, and I like to centre myself in the tenets of sustainability. Sustainability is complex and very situation dependent. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions, and that's been heard a lot in these discussions. We have many technologies in our tool box, both established and new, different types of plastics, different recovery methods and different metrics. We can use all these in the variety of situations we find ourselves in to make sustainable plastic choices. This will make up the bulk of my remarks today.

First I think it's important to take a step back and to clarify exactly what we mean by “plastics”. One thing I say in my lectures is that all plastics are polymers but not all polymers are plastics. Polymers are the long-chain molecules that make up plastics. However, the term “plastic” is a description of behaviour that has become synonymous with the materials we use every day. But polymers can show many types of behaviour.

Plastics are deformable, they can be heated and remoulded. Rubbers and elastics can be re-formed, but the molecular structure makes them unable to be re-formed when broken. Resins, adhesives and lubricants are struck in their structure, and they can’t be re-formed either. Very few of these materials are recyclable and they also have very little value at the end of their lifetimes. This means that the conversation about plastic pollution should be extended to encompass all polymers.

Even if we only focus on plastic polymer products there's another level of complexity when it comes to the length of the use of these materials. Conversations are very focused on single-use products. These are things you use for less than one day. They often come in contact with food and other organic matter, making useful separation very difficult. These are things like food service items, agricultural mulch, food packaging. We can also think about short-term use products and packaging. These are things used for less than one month, for example. These come in contact with liquids, gels and powders. You can think about things like shampoo containers, cleaning supplies, toothpaste tubes. We also have consumer products used for one month plus, everyday products like toothbrushes, clothing, storage containers, outdoor furniture. Then finally we have the advanced engineering plastics, things used in long-term, highly durable and very targeted applications. These are plastics used in your computers, your automobiles, high-tech devices and medicine.

So we have four broad categories of plastic polymer products. Each of these have different technical requirements. They have different interactions with consumers, and need different ways to manage their waste. To truly change the conversation on plastics we need to reframe the way we value these resources and improve the systems that handle them.

I mentioned we have many tools in our tool box. These include things like circular economy, bioeconomy, sustainable materials management, zero waste, life-cycle analysis, cradle-to-cradle design, industrial symbiosis, compostable and biodegradable plastics. These tools can be used in combination or by themselves in different scenarios to trace the most sustainable course of action. However, we need to be aware that the system we currently operate in is not perfect and what is sustainable today may not be sustainable tomorrow.

A framework that we're all familiar with is the five Rs: reduce, reuse, recirculate, recycle, recover.

Reduce is the first and the hardest. Our social and cultural norms are at the centre of plastic pollution. Zero waste initiatives and problematic plastic bans challenge the core assumption that we need all these things. We need to support these steps and make policies that harmonize the conversation across the whole country so that Canadians and business operators know that this is now what we call normal.

Reusing, repairing and redesigning products so their components can be reused and recycled and implementing recycled content targets will all help maintain the value of our resources for longer and build the end markets we need to make these options economically viable.

I'll skip ahead to talk about recirculating, that is, redesigning our industries so they circulate in a circular economy; recycling, not just conventional mechanical recycling, but advanced chemical recycling; and also biological recycling in the form of composting and anaerobic digestion.

One tool in our tool box that hasn't been discussed very often is the idea of the bioeconomy. This is trying to separate our plastic production from the consumption of fossil fuels. This has led to the development of bio-derived plastics made from biological feedstocks, which can be designed to be either recyclable or biodegradable.

There are many voices in this conversation with vested interests in the status quo, and this can feed into the discussion as to whether compostable or recyclable is better. My view is that both have a place in this conversation as long as they're both supported by the development of infrastructure and open communication among producers, consumers and policy-makers.

I'll close by saying that sustainability is inherently complicated. Sustainability for food packaging will look different to sustainability for toothbrush manufacturing, and it's important to have a clear vision of what we want our plastics economy to look like.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak, and I look forward to answering your questions and expanding on some of the things I've said today.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you so much for your abbreviated comments. We have your written statement that was submitted, and we will have it translated and sent out to the committee members.

We'll jump now to GreenMantra Technologies and Ryan L'Abbe, who is also joining us by video conference.

Sir, I will turn it over to you for seven minutes.

Mr. Ryan L'Abbe (Vice-President, Operations, GreenMantra Technologies): Mr. Chairman and honourable members, thanks for the opportunity to talk with you today from Cleveland. I'm here for the Plastics Recycling World Expo that happens to be here this week, so unfortunately, I wasn't able to there in Ottawa to present to you directly.

By way of background, I've spent the last 25 years of my career in the beverage manufacturing and recycling industries as a brand owner, a plastics reprocessor, and a secondary user of waste plastics in a new and emerging chemical company called GreenMantra Technologies, where I am currently the vice-president of operations.

GreenMantra, for those who don't know about us, is an early-stage growth company that has developed a proprietary technology called catalytic depolymerization that uses heat and a catalyst to convert long-chain plastics, which were talked about just a minute ago, into shorter segments at a molecular level.

Our technology has been categorized by many as chemical recycling, although we differ substantially from other technologies such as pyrolysis, which you may have heard of before.

Our process is more gentle and surgical. It uses no chemicals, water, or other additives to convert the plastic into a synthetic wax. We are now replacing traditional petroleum waxes in the market. Unlike other chemical recycling processes you may know of, we yield between 90% and 95% of the plastic into the final wax, and none of our by-products go to landfill. Unlike many of the processes like pyrolysis or gasification that may have char or other emissions, nothing goes to landfill from our process.

Synthetic waxes, for those of you who don't know much about them, have historically been used and produced by the largest chemical companies in the world—Dow, DuPont, and BASF, to name a few. They are the base ingredients in a lot of the materials that we use every day in construction, such as paints, coatings, laminated lumber, cabling and many other applications.

Our new disruptive technology is making synthetic wax additives that are used in a variety of different industries such as the manufacturing of asphalt roofing products, asphalt roads, and plastics processing and compounding. GreenMantra currently sources millions of pounds a year of post-consumer recycled plastics, mostly high-density polyethylene, number two plastics, number four polyethylene films, and number five polypropylene tubs and lids.

Recently our technology and engineering group has created a great technology that is now able to convert number six polystyrene foam into a new and unique polymer that is used in inks, coatings and in the foam industry. As a result, we will be starting a new process later on this year to expand the collection and use of post-consumer polystyrene such as you find in electronics packaging and foam cups.

Due to a shortage of materials in Canada, we source materials across North America. There aren't enough materials available for sale in Canada currently. We do not process bales at our facility. We work symbiotically with the mechanical recycling industry. I came from that industry and I know the important role that they play in the entire process. Mechanical recycling and chemical recycling work closely together and are necessary for the broader adoption of recycled plastics in our economy.

GreenMantra's first commercial plant began operations in 2012 in Brantford, Ontario. We employ over 40 fantastic people who work in well-paying sustainable engineering and technology jobs. We operate our plant 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and we're in the process of doubling our capacity in Brantford to meet the ongoing needs for our product.

Our customers typically have been from the U.S. market. They understand the value proposition that we bring to their businesses and are much more aggressive in trying to capture the benefits of sustainability and cost savings. Unfortunately, the adoption of our technology has been less enthusiastic in Canada, and I sense that Canadian producers are much more risk averse than their competitors south of the border.

Over my time in the industry as a plastics reprocessor, I have had a few thoughts I'd like to share with the committee about how we can improve plastics recycling in general in Canada.

First of all, plastics are a wonderful material. They are valuable. They preserve the life of food on our shelves. They bring us advanced medicine. They are truly not the enemy. Wasteful human behaviour and inadequate collection and recycling systems are at the root of the pollution problem.

● (1625)

Second, any material to be recycled must have market value. Higher market value results in higher rates of collection and higher rates of reuse. The equation is very, very simple. Value can be created either artificially with deposit schemes or you can create it by increasing demand.

In Ontario, a very good example is the Beer Store. I worked in one of the large breweries for over a decade. Its reuse of materials—over 96% of materials are used a second time—is a model we should be looking at to increase the collection and reuse of our packaging materials.

Third, simplicity in the plastics formulation is key to using materials a second time. Complex constructions such as multi-layer plastics and films are more difficult to recycle. Additives and fillers, especially those compostable additives and calcium carbonate, make those plastics more difficult to be used a second time.

Fourth, landfilling is way too cheap in Canada. If we had more expensive landfill costs in Canada, economies would emerge to reuse more plastics.

Last but not least, the solution to the plastics problem will require co-operation from all elements of the supply chain.

At GreenMantra Technologies, there are three elements that will drive the economics and growth of economics in recycling.

First, the federal government could significantly increase the use of recycled plastics by establishing minimum use standards for goods offered for sale in Canada. We don't have to start at 100%, but starting at 50% would lead to a dramatic increase in the amount of plastic consumed and recycled in Canada.

Second, the federal government has exclusive powers to immediately expand the minimal recycled content in the goods and services that they purchase.

Last, there's a great opportunity for the federal government to lead harmonization of policy and help the CCME in forging a new consensus amongst themselves so we can find a way forward and re-establish a new norm for recycling in Canada.

Thanks again for the opportunity. I'll take questions.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you again for your abbreviated statement and for joining us from across the border today.

Committee members, I am looking at the clock. We are expecting another bell in about seven minutes. Of course, once the bells start, we can't continue without unanimous consent. I'm wondering if there is agreement from the committee. We'll hear from Mr. Klaassen next. If we have agreement, we could then hear from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. If there's also agreement, we could do one really abbreviated round of questions of three minutes each. That would take us about 15 minutes into the bells. I expect by the time the bells happen, we get over there and we vote, that we probably won't be coming back. I wonder, once we start this next round of questions, if there is agreement from the committee to just roll right into the last one, and if there is interest, to ask some very quick questions.

Yes, from the Conservatives.

Let's do that.

Mr. Klaassen, I'll give you your seven minutes. Then we'll roll right into the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and we'll follow with some very quick questions.

● (1630)

Mr. James Gunvaldsen Klaassen (Lawyer, Ecojustice Canada): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the honourable members of the committee for inviting Ecojustice to speak to the committee today with respect to plastic pollution.

I'm a staff lawyer with Ecojustice. I'm based in the Halifax office which was recently opened. I hope you've received my written submission. It's a brief that was provided yesterday. It has two appendices. The two appendices are examples of how we might use the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to actually regulate plastics now without any major changes to legislation. It would require some regulations being made.

My presentation focuses on that act. We call it CEPA, as you may know. It shows how CEPA can be used to effectively control plastics and prevent them from entering the natural environment. The committee has no doubt heard evidence as to the many harms that plastic can and does cause to the environment and to human health.

The two appendices to my brief show examples of how we believe CEPA can be used effectively. The first is the microbeads example, which you are no doubt familiar with. It shows what can happen when there's a unanimous resolution of the House and the government takes initiative and moves things forward. It happened very quickly and produced an excellent result.

The second is an action that we took on behalf of several clients. It was a request to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to add single-use plastics, microplastics and plastic microfibres to the priority substances list under CEPA. If it had continued on that track, it would have—and we hope still will—lead to an assessment of those substances, which would then open an array of powers that allow the government to regulate those substances and control plastic waste. Key to the use of the CEPA mechanism is to conduct a toxicity assessment under CEPA.

“Toxic” is defined under section 64 of CEPA. A comprehensive toxicity assessment must be undertaken in respect of the plastic waste that is accumulating in our environment. In the context of such an assessment, the word “toxic” has a particular and a broader meaning than what we might usually think of as the ordinary meaning of the word “toxic”. It's not simply poisonous, if you think of it that way. It is much broader. It's a very broad definition, and the details of that definition are set out in the brief that we submitted. I won't go through that in detail.

Section 68 of CEPA provides guidance as to some of the factors that can be investigated and considered when determining whether a substance is toxic. It's a very wide range of inquiry that can be undertaken. Once the substance has been found to be CEPA toxic, then CEPA provides a wide array of measures and powers to prevent and control the environmental harms caused by that substance. The toxicity assessments themselves are science-based reviews of the substance and gauge the effect of the substance on the environment, biodiversity, species and other things.

To trigger a toxicity assessment under CEPA, one example was the process that was followed in the microbeads situation. It appears in that case that a toxicity assessment was conducted under a combination of CEPA sections 68, 71 and 75. These are overlapping provisions, and it seems that they were used together. Section 68, as I've said, empowers the minister to conduct assessments.

Under section 71, the minister issued a notice requiring persons engaged in activity, specifically in this case, importers, exporters and manufacturers of microbeads to provide information and submissions. An initial science summary was prepared, followed by wide-ranging consultations on the report. The bans in other jurisdictions were also considered. That is often a shortcut to effective action under CEPA because in many cases the science has already been compiled in other jurisdictions to the satisfaction of those jurisdictions, which have then issued orders. We think that this mix demonstrates the flexibility of the CEPA process to conduct assessments. It would work very well for plastics.

● (1635)

Another means to do so is the priority substances list, which is the means we attempted to use via the request to the minister. This is more available to people outside of government who wish the government to take action but are not able to directly trigger a toxicity assessment. They then must engage the statutory process. They can do so by issuing a request to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change under subsection 76(3) of CEPA. Appendix B is our submission under that section. As I said, it requested that single-use plastics, microplastics and plastic microfibres be added to the priority substances list.

The minister is to decide whether to place the substances on the list, but in our case, despite the passage of a statutory deadline of 90 days, the minister has not yet made a decision. We hope one will be made, but it hasn't happened yet.

If the substance is placed on the priority substances list, it is prioritized for a toxicity assessment. If an assessment is not conducted within five years, which is ample time—more than ample time, we believe—the requester can then ask for a board of review assessment on toxicity and a recommendation. The board would then make a recommendation to the minister in that way. This has not happened because this particular initiative is stalled at the request stage.

Another route is, as I said, subsection 75(3), which is about bans in other jurisdictions or other governments in Canada. That is a route that can be followed as well.

Another route is international water pollution, and in this case it could be plastic pollution. That triggers a different section of CEPA, but it is another way of getting to regulations to control the substance.

If a toxicity assessment reaches the conclusion that a substance is toxic or capable of being toxic, then the ministers can recommend to the Governor in Council that an order be issued, which would add the substance to schedule 1, the list of toxic substances under the act. This is under section 90 of the act. In the case of microbeads, this is the process that was followed, and it ended up with microbeads being added to the list. Then regulations followed, as the committee is no doubt aware.

We feel that regulations of this nature are quite suitable and could be used to control many types of plastic pollution.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Again, I'm sorry to have to rush everybody a bit. Just so you know, the bells have just started to ring, so that gives us 30 minutes. We do have agreement to go 15 minutes into that time.

We'll now go to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Mr. Carlton and Mr. Gemmel, I'll turn it over to you for your opening statements.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brock Carlton (Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Thank you very much for having us today.

[*English*]

FCM is really pleased to welcome this opportunity to bring Canada's local government voice to your study. As you mentioned, I'm here with Matt Gemmel, policy manager in our policy shop. When we get to questions, he may have some technical comments to make.

We know that plastics are part of Canadians' everyday lives, and we know that plastics are an ecological issue. As Canada's residential waste management leaders, municipalities know that this is also an economic issue, a cost centre in municipal budgets that competes with other local priorities. Whether it's plastic bags, straws, cutlery, packaging, etc., all of these single-use plastics are swelling landfill sites, littering our shorelines and our natural spaces and, in some cases, damaging municipal machinery and increasing the costs of repairs.

For municipalities, this is a critical issue, and municipalities are taking action. They're implementing waste reduction strategies, processing recyclables through blue box programs, using innovative technologies to divert recyclables from landfill, banning the most destructive products and educating Canadians on sustainable consumption and waste management. Nationally, FCM's board has adopted five resolutions on plastics that are driving our policy and informing our work, including last fall's submission to CCME.

The core of FCM's message is always the same. This is a very complex challenge, and there are roles for all orders of government, industry and many stakeholders. Federal leadership in particular is vital, and that leadership only starts with investments. For instance, we see new plastics entering the Canadian markets that are technically recyclable, but that's meaningless if local infrastructure can't handle them or if there's no value in the commodity markets.

In the absence of changes in the current approach, new investments will be required to help municipalities and the private sector collect, sort and process plastic. This should include investments in state-of-the-art optical sorting facilities and the latest mechanical and chemical plastic recycling technologies.

However, in addition to investments, federal leadership also means putting forward smart policies that drive change. Reducing plastic waste will require transitioning to a circular economy for plastics. That means keeping plastic products in the economy and out of the environment. That means zero waste. But with the low cost to make and dispose of plastic, industry has little incentive to lead this transition. That's why we need federal policy leadership. As we'll set out, the federal government has jurisdiction under CEPA—as we've also just heard from Ecojustice—to take both regulatory and non-regulatory action to reduce plastic waste.

Of course, federal government leadership also means convening key players to guide Canada's transition to that circular economy for plastics. We see promise in the Canada-wide strategy on zero plastic waste, put forward by federal, provincial and territorial environment ministers last November. A well-designed strategy should help coordinate and enhance action across all orders of government. That includes empowering municipalities to help achieve national and international waste reduction targets. That empowering of municipalities is part of our call more broadly for a modernizing of the municipal-federal relationship, so that municipalities are engaged in all federal strategies that touch our cities and communities.

The strategy should also set out the role of industry, where manufacturers, distributors and retailers help manage plastic products throughout their life cycle. The role of industry is critical. Extended producer responsibility programs make industry directly responsible for reducing resource consumption. Most provinces and territories already have some form of EPR in place, but these need to be stronger, better coordinated and bolstered by common definitions and performance standards for plastic. It is why we say that the federal government can lead that effort by using existing powers in CEPA.

FCM is calling on the federal government to list plastic waste as a regulated substance under CEPA's schedule 1. By doing this, the federal government can establish a common policy framework to address plastic waste across the country. The federal government can define who is a producer. It can set out responsibilities for producers. It can develop and enforce standards for the recyclability and compostability of packaging and plastic products. It can develop performance targets for the amount of plastic that must be recovered and reused or recycled. Using CEPA to strengthen and coordinate EPR will create the regulatory framework for an integrated value chain, from virgin resin production to packaging, manufacturing and product design, through to retail collection, sorting and processing and reuse.

● (1640)

The costs of coping with the growing plastic waste stream cannot continue to fall on property taxpayers. These costs are forcing fiscally limited municipalities to trade off effective waste management against other local priorities. Industry needs to pay for the plastic pollution it creates. When that happens, price signals will drive industry to redesign packaging and plastic products. It's the smart way forward, and it is urgent. Our costs are growing as plastic in the waste stream grows, and as global markets for recycled plastics tighten up. As we all know, China has recently moved to limit imports for plastic and other recycled materials.

Canada needs to get ahead of this. It can only happen with federal leadership.

I'll close by underlining that municipalities are your front-line partners in this challenge, and our partnership has a track record of success to build on. Just look at FCM's green municipal fund, or the municipalities for climate innovation program. Both are federal-municipal partnerships. Both are bringing life to innovative waste management solutions. With these new investments, these kinds of initiatives can be expanded into the plastic space, replicated and scaled nationwide.

We all have a stake in meeting national and international targets, and building better lives for Canadians. We have a lot of work to do, and with industry and each order of government all playing their respective parts, Canada can make progress in reducing plastic pollution and adopting more resource-efficient resources to manage plastic.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Because this is a very abbreviated hearing today, I will invite each of the witnesses, based on the questions we have, or thoughts you have, to submit a further brief to us. We take up to 10 pages, so if you would like to send in any more information that would help us in the report we're working on, please do that at your earliest convenience. We're going to start drafting the report next week, but if you do have other thoughts, the invitation is there to send us more information through the clerk.

We're going to Mr. Fisher for three minutes of very quick questions.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, all, for being here, and as the chair said, our apologies for the interruptions. It's unfortunate we're not going to get a chance to have several rounds of questions.

I'm going right to FCM. First of all, Brock, thank you for all the work you do. You talked about convening key players. You have the ability to convene probably 50% or 60% of the municipalities in Canada. Is that accurate?

Mr. Brock Carlton: It's a higher percentage, but yes, the idea is accurate.

Mr. Darren Fisher: It's a higher percentage, so there are 3,700 municipalities, and you have somewhere around 2,000 or 2,500.

Dr. Chile and Mr. L'Abbe both talked about the inadequate collection systems. We know about the jurisdictions. We know the municipalities collect all the waste; the provincial governments tend to tell the municipalities what's in the permit and then the federal government dictates toxicity through CEPA.

With those jurisdictional issues, has there been a discussion with your 2,000 members of FCM on how you can harmonize the collection systems? Right now, I can go to the Ottawa airport, and it's different. Toronto is different. Halifax does a great job on diversion, and a great job with their waste. But it's different everywhere, and it's really difficult to enforce. One restaurant does four streams and another restaurant does two.

We talked about this two days ago. Harmonizing these collection systems is so important, and I'm not sure.... Perhaps the federal government does have the ability to put that arm down, but is there a discussion at FCM about harmonizing and coming up with a plan for the whole country? Can you be the driving force behind that?

Mr. Brock Carlton: I'll ask Matt to comment on that, but will say that part of our challenge in harmonization is that we have all the different jurisdictions at the provincial-territorial level. Finding national harmony is a challenge. We've certainly had discussions about how to streamline and make this more effective.

I'll ask Matt to characterize those conversations.

Mr. Matt Gemmel (Manager, Policy and Research, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Thanks for the question. I know you know this issue well from your time on municipal council in Halifax.

I think that description of the differences in collection across the country is a really good example of why we're calling on the federal government to use CEPA to harmonize and to create common standards across the country, in order to provide the regulatory framework for industry. Any one municipality only has the ability to manage what's coming in through the blue box, or through commercial recycling streams. No one municipality has the ability to control what's being brought in and sold on the marketplace, or what the global commodity markets are for recycled products. That's why you get this diversity of lists of what can go into the blue box. It's an issue everywhere.

It's particularly confusing, I know, for consumers in the greater Toronto area. The City of Toronto has different rules from Brampton, Mississauga and Vaughan. Public education campaigns that municipalities are leading are reaching the same consumers, and they're confused. What do I put out when I'm at work in Toronto? What do I put in the blue box when I'm at home in Brampton? Each municipality is dealing with the marketplace for recycled materials. They're dealing with recyclers in Canada or abroad, and they take different materials.

Canada internationally is still a small market, of course, but I think it's our best shot at sending the right signals to industry to coordinate the design of packaging, so that it maximizes what's recyclable, and the value in those products.

The Chair: Thank you. We're out of time.

We're going to jump to Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'm going to continue along the same lines as my fellow member Darren Fisher.

My question is for the FCM representatives. Right now, Canada has no standards for recycling programs. Mr. L'Abbe even talked about the difficulty he had sourcing feedstock.

Since you're a Canadian association, couldn't you establish a standard for all your members? I think they all share the same objectives; they just work towards them in a different way. What's more, those objectives may not be as clearly defined in every region. The fact of the matter is that plastic is plastic, whether it's in the Yukon, Quebec or Ontario.

As I see it, you have the ability to encourage your members to adopt a standardized program, one that you, or experts you partnered with, could circumscribe. Leaving it up to your members to choose whether or not to adopt individual standards leads to chaos on the recycling front. Isn't this a golden opportunity for the FCM to take the lead on the issue?

● (1650)

Mr. Matt Gemmel: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

I think, similar to the previous question, you're right. The diversity, the range of recycling practices across the country is a real challenge right now.

I have two points.

First, just to clarify, FCM's role really is to lobby the federal government, and so we don't have a role to dictate policy to our members. At the same time, we do have an important role in convening all municipalities and trying to collaborate with the federal government on solutions. That's a part of what we're trying to do here today.

I think the collaboration, or the harmonization that's needed is not only around collection and processing, which is the municipal role, but also in product design. As we heard from some of the speakers earlier, if the types of plastics being sold into the marketplace have additives or are multi-layer, or have a certain chemistry that makes recycling very difficult or expensive, or are not compostable, depending on the technology, then it doesn't have the same value. It's very difficult for that to be sold to a recycler or to be recycled.

It's similar, as well, when you're talking about reducing the amount of plastics being consumed in the first place, or making plastics more durable so that they can be used more times. Municipalities don't have the ability to dictate to industry how products are designed and sold into the marketplace. We think that's a role for the federal government through the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're just over 15 minutes on the bell.

Wayne, I'll go to you.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Very quickly, for FCM, as a former mayor of Cranbrook, I very much appreciate the work that you do.

If you haven't already done so, if you could send us some of the best examples you see across the country of municipalities dealing with plastic recycling, that would be great—perhaps a green award winner. If you could submit that to the committee, that would be great.

Mr. Brock Carlton: Yes, we can do that. There are some really excellent examples, and we'll send some along.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: My question is for Ms. Chile.

I've heard from other witnesses that perhaps we should not be dealing in biodegradable or compostable plastics at all. What's your view on that? The theory is that we shouldn't produce them at all if they can't be recycled or reused, and that compostable plastics are actually bad for the environment.

Ms. Love-Ese Chile: That's a great question, and I think that's a really important point to make.

One of the main reasons that we're not seeing the environmental potential of these materials being met is that we simply don't have the infrastructure to handle them.

The first generations of these materials were not designed in collaboration with waste management operators. They were designed in their own kind of little silo. They've slowly been making their way into the market. Now, we're wanting compost operators to handle these materials that they don't really understand. So, there are many reasons why we're not seeing them degrade in the way that we want them to.

I submitted a report, a white paper that I wrote, called "Composting biodegradable plastics". It really does outline the science behind composting and the science behind the degradation of biodegradables. However, the thing is that there are many applications, mostly when you have food waste and plastics coming together, where it's very difficult to clean off the food or the oil, etc., from the plastic in order to be able to recycle it appropriately. It would be much easier to be able to put both the food and the plastic in some sort of composting operation where it all gets broken down into the same soil material.

I'm not saying that all plastics should be compostable, but there are definitely times when it's just a lot easier for that waste management for them to be compostable. That's really what I want to highlight. There are so many of these different tools in our tool box that we can use, and depending on the different situation that plastic is in—if it's food packaging or if it's toothbrushes—it really depends on whether or not we want to go down the recycling route or the composting route. It just means that we have to really think about what the materials are that we're using.

● (1655)

The Chair: We're pretty much out of time. The bells are at 12 and a half minutes right now, so we need to adjourn and get to the House.

The meeting is adjourned.

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