

Ignoring plastic health impact “delusional”, say leading health scientists

- **Scientists, campaigners, and insurers unite behind demands for robust UN Treaty during final negotiations**
- **New research finds financial valuation models fail to recognise the true risk of plastic pollution**
- **Leading health scientist warns inaction on plastic pollution “a political choice” in new film**

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 29th NOVEMBER (GMT) (02:01 CET) (09:01 KST)

LEADING SCIENTISTS and campaigners have today warned governments that ignoring the impact of plastic on human health is “delusional” at the final round of negotiations for a UN Global Plastic Treaty.

The Plastic Health Council was joined by Plastic Soup Foundation, A Plastic Planet, Earth Action, Greenpeace, BreakFreeFromPlastic at INC 5 in Busan in calling for a robust Treaty that cuts plastic production to shield future generations from the impact of plastic and endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) entering human bodies.

The event marked the release of ‘Scientists Speak Out’, a film produced by Plastic Soup Foundation. The documentary interviews leading health scientist, Professor Thais Mauad, University of Sao Paulo, who discovered the presence of plastic in the brain in the world-first discovery this year.

Prof Thais Mauad states, *“if you don’t think that plastic will affect you, it is a delusion. Microplastics in our body affect the DNA structure of cells, damaging our health. I’m afraid of plastic as production is increasing and our health will be increasingly exposed to these adverse consequences.”*

“The duty of a government is to protect its people. When a government allows the plastic industry to use toxic plastic additives, the government is supporting the development of a disease and not protecting the population. It instead protects the profits of the fossil fuel industry.”

“Those with the ability to make real change are policymakers, and such action is a political choice. We do not have to lose this battle.”

To coincide with the event, [new research has been released by Earth Action](#) that provides guidance to financial institutions on how to integrate financial risks associated with plastic in corporate valuations.

According to Earth Action’s research, today’s financial valuation models do not fully capture such plastic pollution risks, highlighting the need for increased corporate disclosure of plastic usage and the opportunity for the UN treaty to provide clarity to financial institutions on potential corporate risk from plastic usage.

A pilot study produced in collaboration with insurance provider a.s.r and Dutch NGO, Plastic Soup Foundation, assessed plastic pollution and the associated health risks from the activities of a select group

of companies in a.s.r.'s investment portfolio. a.s.r. evaluated indirect and direct health impacts of plastic pollution.

The pilot's findings suggest that a plastic footprint score should be used to guide sustainable investment decisions that acknowledge the material's health impact.

Mies Ligtenberg, Senior advisor Sustainable Investment at a.s.r said: *"We are pleased to collaborate with Plastic Soup Foundation and Earth Action on this research. At a.s.r., we acknowledge the importance of understanding and recognising the real risks of plastic pollution, not only for our health and that of our planet but also for the financial stability of businesses.*

This research highlights the need for greater transparency and clear guidelines so that we can collectively work towards a future where plastic pollution is reduced and future generations are protected. We therefore support the call for a robust UN treaty that pursues these goals."

The plastic footprint methodology, developed by the Plastic Footprint Network, refers to the process of evaluating the effect that the plastic generated by an individual, organisation, community or country has on the environment. The assessment methodology is similar to the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, which provides the world's most widely used greenhouse gas accounting standards for organisations, governments and NGOs.

According to the research, a plastic footprint measurement including health impact metrics would allow investors to evaluate high-risk companies for targeted engagement on plastic reduction and advocate for increased corporate transparency in plastic footprint reporting.

More than 500 million metric tonnes of plastic are produced every year for use in a wide variety of applications. Scientists have compiled a list of over 16,000 chemicals present in plastic products and found that more than 4,000 of these were hazardous to human health and the environment.

A range of health concerns are linked to plastic chemicals including obesity, fertility issues, increased risk of autism and cancer. In the US alone, the annual health and economic costs due to chemical additives included in plastic exceeds \$250 billion.

With continued plastic usage presenting a \$100 billion annual financial risk to businesses by 2040, researchers believe corporate failure to mitigate the impact could result in financial risk and legal action that impairs the profitability of an organisation.

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

The Plastic Health Council

- The Plastic Health Council has one simple goal - to protect future generations from the manmade plastic health crisis.
- Throughout these INC negotiations, we have a narrow window to impact the UN Plastics Treaty, to ensure the final Treaty is robust and does indeed protect the unborn, the next generations from the impact of microplastics, nano-plastics and hazardous chemicals within plastic. The scientists are clear. We have the evidence. Now we need to act.
- Scientists Speak Out #2 - Plastic & Brains can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slmexHHJ7Lg>

EA Earth Action

- EA Earth Action is a Swiss-based, mission-driven consulting firm that designs solutions and metrics for a sustainable future, leading the development of plastic footprint methodologies and data.
- View the research here: <https://www.e-a.earth/insights-on-private-finance-integrating-plastic-related-risks-and-opportunities-in-financial-valuation-models/>

References:

- Plastic in brain study: http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.40018?utm_source=For+The+Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_term=091624
- Cost to US healthcare from EDCs: <https://academic.oup.com/jes/article/8/2/bvad163/7513992>
- \$100 billion annual financial risk to businesses by 2040: <https://plasticfree.com/free-whitepaper-the-post-plastic-economy>
- More than 500 million tonnes of plastic to consumer in 2024: <https://www.unep.org/inc-plastic-pollution#:~:text=Plastic%20pollution%20crisis,1.2%20billion%20tonnes%20by%202060.>
- Over 16,000 chemicals present in plastic products and found that more than 4,000 of these were hazardous to human health and the environment: <https://zenodo.org/records/10701706>