



The solution is on land: No plastic in the oceans

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The Recyclate Initiative from Werner & Mertz of Mainz has achieved recognition as a best-practice example way beyond Germany's borders. In mid-March Reinhard Schneider, managing partner of Werner & Mertz GmbH, was invited to two conferences in Brussels and Berlin to speak about the family-owned company's commitment to sustainability.

At the **Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference** in Brussels more than 1000 European delegates from government agencies, environmental protection organizations and businesses met to discuss the progress made in implementation since the European Commission adopted the Circular Economy Package in December 2015.



Reinhard Schneider, managing partner of Werner & Mertz GmbH, at the Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference in Brussels on 9 March 2017. Photo & Copyright Werner & Mertz



Even broader international interests were represented at the **G20 Workshop on Resource Efficiency** in Berlin where government delegations and speakers from all G20 countries exchanged information on their use of resources.





Reinhard Schneider, managing partner of Werner & Mertz GmbH, at the G 20 Workshop on Resource Efficiency in Berlin on 16 March 2017. Photo & Copyright Werner & Mertz

Schneider presented his company Werner & Mertz to the international audience as a best-practice example of how a medium-sized enterprise can implement the circular economy successfully. The work of the Recyclate Initiative, which Schneider established, plays a major role. "We follow a true circular economy principle with the goal of consuming no crude oil for the production of plastic packaging. Instead we reprocess a previously untapped material obtained from the Yellow Bag at such a high quality that it can even be used for foodstuff packaging." Since the work began, Werner & Mertz has put into the market more than 30 million PET packages made of 100 percent used plastic with a share of 20 percent recyclates from the Yellow Bag.

"We can recycle not only PET but also HDPE, one of the world's most widely used plastics, without any loss of quality," said Schneider. With the use of HDPE packaging, 100 percent of which comes from the Yellow Bag household waste collection system, a way has been found to close the material cycle for yet another type of plastic.



PET bottles and HDPE bottles can be made of 100% used plastic with a high proportion of recyclates obtained from the Yellow Bag collection system. Copyright Werner & Mertz



Another point of interest was the use of the circular economy for the benefit of the eco system, primarily by preventing plastic from getting into to the world's oceans. "Microplastic is going to be an important issue in the future," Schneider predicted. Europe is not the main polluter of the waters with plastic, according to IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), but the continent could serve as an international role model for marine protection without having to resort to incineration, which increases CO₂ emissions.

Less plastic waste in the world's oceans would bring a reduction in the secondary microplastic which is generated when large pieces of plastic fall apart. The resolution is a closed circular economy for plastic, according to the UN environmental agency UNEP, the World Economic Forum and international non-governmental organizations such as the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

The Recyclate Initiative is an important step toward this international goal. It is making progress on establishing closed systems for the production, use and genuine recycling of plastic packaging without a loss of quality. The Initiative also works to create public awareness of the need to eliminate the causes of plastic pollution instead of fighting only the symptoms. The solution to the problem is on land and not in the ocean.

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