JOINT STATEMENT OF EDANA AND INDA ON THE NONWOVENS INDUSTRY’S RESPONSE TO ELEMENTS NOT DISCUSSED AT INC-2

Highlights

- The nonwovens industry represents products that are vital to health and equality for humans across the globe. It is an industry that is committed to evolving and addressing the negative environmental and human health impacts of plastic, with a hope for accelerated investment in more sustainable production and increased incentives for innovation.

- A clear and rigorous definition of plastic is an important driver of innovation. Such a definition should clearly outline what is and what is not a plastic based on science. Any definition of plastic, particularly for the purpose of reducing plastics-related waste, should recognise the biodegradability aspects of materials reducing the environmental impact of the end-of-life stage.

- We look forward to continued technical discussions around emerging chemistries and the scope of the treaty, advocating that any regulation should be framed in such a way to allow for the innovations that provide increasing benefits to the public at decreasing environmental impact.

What are Nonwovens?

Nonwovens are innovative, high-tech, engineered fabrics made from fibres. They are used in a wide range of consumer and industrial products either in combination with other materials or alone. Nonwovens are designed for their specific application, ranging from thin, lightweight nonwovens to strong and durable nonwovens, be it consumer or industrial applications. Nonwovens include thousands of durable and disposable products such as personal care items, hygiene products, PPE, medical equipment, construction materials, automotive fixtures, and filtration media.

Nonwovens are used in so many end-uses because they provide numerous environmental, economic, and performance benefits. For example, the increase in the usage of nonwovens in vehicle fixtures has decreased vehicle weight thus increasing fuel efficiency and decreasing CO2 emissions. Other examples of benefits of nonwovens usage include better infectious aerosol filtration than a traditional woven cloth, and improved function of hygiene products leading to healthier skin.
Industry Associations

EDANA is the Brussels-based trade association who helps its members to design their future, serving more than 310 companies in the nonwovens and related industries, across over 30 countries. EDANA member companies supply products and services ranging from raw materials to finished products and everything in between including machinery, components and development and testing facilities. It represents not only all types of nonwovens, but also materials often used with nonwovens, such as films and superabsorbent polymers. Its mission is to create the foundation for sustainable growth of the nonwovens and related industries through active promotion, education and dialogue.

Founded in 1968, INDA is the North America-based trade association for the nonwovens industry. INDA member companies also represent the entire nonwovens value chain including raw materials and roll goods producers, machinery manufacturers, converters, and brand owners. INDA works each day to fulfil our mission of “fostering member and industry success through its activities.” INDA provides thought-leadership in innovation and technology through conference content, recognition awards, and industry reports; protecting markets that are important to our members through focused Product Stewardship; advocating for industry sectors impacted by regulatory or consumer-driven issues; and organizing face-to-face interaction through industry expositions and events.

Sustainability Initiatives

In 2019, EDANA developed a Sustainability Vision 2030, giving clear insight into the priority topics on sustainability for our industry. The vision combines the most prominent topics of the materiality matrix with key United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) for the industry. The four key areas are: Sustainable supply chain, Eco-efficient, Building trust and Responsible end-of-life. Each area is defined by a clear ambition. The vision aligns the industries’ priorities and allows the industry to collectively head in the same direction. It is a guideline to help our members identify their priorities and further develop their own sustainability strategy. EDANA’s role is to facilitate interaction and help the industry progress towards their sustainability goals in line with the United Nation’s SDGs. EDANA regularly hosts events and webinars centred around sustainability including the circular economy forum and the upcoming sustainability forum which will be held in Brussels at the end of November.

INDA also conducts a variety of programming concerning sustainability goals and hosts a number of annual conferences, webinars, and events, all of which have featured a heavily increased focus on recycling, biopolymers, and sustainable inputs among other topics in recent years. INDA is committed to highlighting and providing a myriad of resources regarding industry innovation to substantially increase sustainability practices. Other topics that INDA has engaged in promoting a circular supply chain, sustainable fibres, biobased inputs, clean water, and reducing the environmental footprint of many commonly used single-use products.
Industry Recommendations and Elements not Discussed at INC-2

While the nonwovens industry actively supports and participates in the push towards greater sustainability, there are still a few challenges present for our industry that we would like to highlight. The nonwovens industry uses fibres made of plastics (among other raw materials) to produce many of the materials incorporated in end-products for consumers. These plastics are essential for the efficient functioning and integrity of products vital to human health and safety such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and absorbent hygiene products like menstrual products, baby diapers and adult incontinence care products. For example, tampons are everyday necessities for women around the world and allow for an overall increase in their economic circumstances. Given that nonwovens in baby diapers, adult incontinence products, medical dressings, PPE, and wipes are essential for the health and well-being of our most vulnerable populations, our organizations urge the INC to consider these, and other end-uses of plastic polymers when finalizing the treaty so as not to disrupt the global supply of many essential products.

Our organizations also call for the INC to allow for continued innovation. Any approach in addressing global plastics should encourage the inclusion of environmentally friendly inputs, like biodegradable and bio-based plastics or renewable resources whenever they deliver a reduced impact, are responsibly sourced, and are economically viable. In a relatively short period of time, the world has seen the introduction of biodegradable and bio-based plastics from a variety of sources and given how rapidly the plastics industry has changed in recent decades we can only expect that these technologies will only continue to advance. As new chemical breakthroughs in biodegradable and bio-based plastics continue to advance our organizations call on the INC to ensure the continued development and use of biopolymers when defining the scope of which polymers to regulate or ban within the treaty.

150 years ago, we couldn't imagine materials like plastics at all. 100 years ago, we couldn't imagine plastics from non-petroleum sources, 50 years ago we couldn't imagine plastics that could be recycled, 35 years ago we couldn't imagine common commercial plastics that might biodegrade. Today we have plastics made from non-petroleum sources. Any regulation should be framed in such a way to allow for the innovations that provide increasing benefits to the public at decreasing environmental impact.

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