

# SPOTLIGHT ON PLASTIC PELLETS

## THE PROBLEM...

In the EU alone, 167 000 tonnes of plastic pellets enter the environment every year, making it the second largest source of primary microplastic pollution after tyre wear and tear. But what are they? Plastic pellets or “nurdles” are similar in shape and size to lentils. Polymer manufacturers and recyclers are fond of this particular format as it is easy to trade, transport and mold into the final plastic product.

There is a dark side, however: pellets are microplastics and can very easily be spilled into the environment. Most spillages are small in volume but they are happening practically all the time. Occasionally, they can also be larger in impact, as in the case of containers lost at sea.

Spilled pellets pose major risks to the environment, and marine life in particular, as they are often mistaken for food by marine animals. In addition, pellets absorb Persistent Organic Pollutants - toxic chemicals - in particularly high quantities. As a consequence, they enter the food chain, causing biodiversity loss and impacting human health.

## THE GOOD NEWS...

There is light in the tunnel: pellet loss is preventable! Contrary to all the other microplastic pollution sources, which are not always easy to identify, pellet pollution is caused solely by actors in the plastic value chain, who know how to prevent it, even if are not always keen to do so. Although voluntary agreements on preventing pellet loss have existed for 30 years, the problem persists. To improve the situation, we need an EU law that imposes verified pellet loss prevention measures for all actors handling pellets, and disclosure requirements with their clients in the value chain.



The equivalent of a staggering 15 billion plastic bottles - 10 trillion pellets - are lost to the environment every year! Did you know that this could easily be prevented?

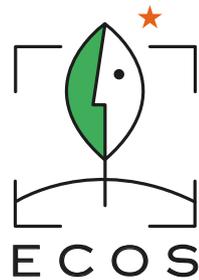
## ECOS WORKS TO...

- Reduce plastics use and tackle all plastics pollution as part of the Rethink Plastic alliance;
- Bring political and policy solutions to the pellet loss issue, to require every business handling pellets to prioritise containment measures, publicly report and clean any spillages, and contribute to transparent value chains;
- Ensure that standards on preventing pellet loss and related voluntary initiatives are credible and set reliable audit mechanisms.

## IN AN IDEAL WORLD...

The plastics industry would be held legally responsible for spilling pellets into the environment. In addition, all businesses involved in handling pellets would be regularly and independently audited to prove that they put measures in place to avoid pellet spills. It would also be public knowledge whether a company implemented pellet loss measures, which would discourage businesses from turning a blind eye to this issue.





## ECOS is the only environmental organisation worldwide specialised in standardisation.

We are an international network of members sharing a vision of a clean and healthy environment where people live in respect of the planet and its natural resources, preserving them for future generations. ECOS aims to influence the development of ambitious standardisation, legislation and political strategies to promote the transition to a clean and circular economy that respects planetary boundaries.

ECOS promotes and defends environmental interests in the development of standards at European and international level, as well as in the development of technical environmental product policies. Thanks to nearly 20 years of experience and a strong network of members and experts, our role in these processes is highly valued and widely recognised.

ECOS is also a member of the Rethink Plastic alliance, which brings together leading European NGOs, and works with European policy-makers to design and deliver policy solutions for a future that is free from plastic pollution.

### The green line to standards



### Where to find us?

ECOS  
Mundo-B, rue d'Edimbourg 26  
1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 894 46 68  
info@ecostandard.org  
www.ecostandard.org

 @ECOS\_Standard  
 ECOS-EU



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