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Press Release

“Our boat crashed into a pile of plastic waste“ Official IFAT 2018 opening: debate on plastics

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- IFAT start with Federal Environmental Minister Schulze
- “There is no one and only solution of the plastics issue“
- “Plastics and the principles of sustainability do not go together“

The opening of the 2018 IFAT was marked by a fierce debate on the probably most pressing environmental issue of today: how shall mankind deal with all that plastic material that polluted the oceans, kills animals and re-enters the food chain with incalculable consequences? There was agreement among the participants of the discussion: we must not and cannot continue like this. The debate was hosted by TV journalist Dirk Steffens. A British environmental activist described a most impressive experience in connection with the plastics issue: a collision with a pile of plastics at sea.

On Monday morning, the official opening of IFAT, the world's leading Trade Fair for Water, Sewage, Waste and Raw Materials Management (May 14 to 18, 2018) set the focus on waste management. A panel discussion was titled: „rethink – reduce – recycle plastic: Innovative Solutions to protect our Rivers and Oceans.“ In his opening speech, Stefan Rummel, Managing Director of Messe München, gave the go-ahead for the debate: „Innovative recycling – technologies, as presented at IFAT cannot be the one and only solution to handle the 8.3 billion tonnes of plastics that have been produced since 1950. Plastic waste is the challenge for all players alongside the value-creation chain.“

Also the German Federal Environmental Minister Svenja Schulze had some introducing words regarding the issue of plastics. In her IFAT opening speech she emphasized the power of consumers on the one hand and, on the other, she

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offered a possible approach of how to act in future: “We should avoid plastics and unnecessary waste. In future, we should conserve resources and decouple economic growth from raw material consumption. Nobody wants plastics in the oceans.” Schulze also emphasized the economic significance of the recycling industry. “Meanwhile, the recycling industry in Germany has a turnover of 70 billion euros per year. In terms of the economy as a whole, this was a very high share.”

The discussion rethink – reduce – recycle plastic began at about noon. Participants were representatives from the industry, economy and from environmental organizations: Dr. Rüdiger Baunemann, CEO of PlasticsEurope Deutschland e.V., Giulio Bonazzi, President of the plastic manufacturer Aquafil S.p.A., James Carnes, Vice President of the Adidas global branding strategy, Dr. Kim Cornelius Detloff, Head of Ocean Protection with Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V. and Emily Penn, ocean activist. Dirk Steffen immediately asked Penn: “Why did you choose to be an ocean activist to fight plastics now?” Penn’s impressive answer: “I had a wake-up experience when travelling from England to Australia. When the passengers were asleep at night, our boat crashed into a pile of plastic waste, amid the ocean, far away from civilization. We all woke up from the loud noise.” Penn’s approach to solve the problem of plastics: “We must avoid plastic waste to a large extent. Whatever lies in the ocean: it is hard to fish it out again. The lion’s share sinks into the deep and breaks into micro-parts. Only a small apart of plastic waste can be seen at the sea surface.”

Environmentalist Dr. Detloff considers the problematic material contradictory. “The making of plastics is the very opposite of sustainability“, the ocean activist says. Referring to the example of the bottle deposit system, he sees the government obliged to step in. “We need to fetch from the oceans as much as we can - and recycle it. And we need laws. Even in a developing country like Ruanda plastic bags have been banned. At least, Germany should impose taxes on plastics. I think a voluntary basis will not get us very far.”

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Italian plastics expert referred to the complex recycling methods required for even plain plastic objects, such as plastic bottles. But he considers this an opportunity. "We cannot simply melt down plastic bottles and make new ones. Then the material will no longer be transparent. In many countries, e.g. Italy, there are statutory rules saying that plastic bottles need to be transparent." However, more chemical process were needed to recycle and re-use such bottles. "This is the big opportunity." Those who recycle by means of chemical processes – as we do – works sustainably. So, we can convert one kilogram of old plastics into almost the same amount of new material – a nearly eternal cycle".

Meanwhile, also Adidas is in this cycle. Brand Strategist Carnes is also concerned about potential image loss in future. "We have now produced a million shoes of the Adidas Parley series. They have been recycled from plastic waste from the oceans. In future, it will be normal to buy products from similar recycled materials", Carnes said. It might even be possible that consumers refrain from buying not recycled products; therefore, the industry is revising its attitude. For Carnes it is essential to invest primarily into education. "For decades, we have been talking about how to leave a better world for future generations. It is as essential to invest into education and, hence, to leave the world better people."

"There is no one and only solution to handle the issue of plastics", said Dr. Baunemann of PlasticsEurope. For example, it was of no use relying on decomposing plastics exclusively. Dr. Baunemann had a striking example: "You will not want the plastic parts in your car to decompose someday." Therefore, each products group needs its own solutions for the future fight against plastic waste. Also, Dr. Baunemann shares Carnes' opinion: "Recyclable products – so-called recyclates – could be the future trend for consumers."

Further information about IFAT on www.ifat.de

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IFAT

IFAT is the world's leading trade event for environmental technology. A total of 3,097 exhibitors from 59 countries, and 136,885 visitors from 168 countries took part in the last event. IFAT is held every two years; the next edition takes place from May 14 to 18, 2018 in Munich.

IFAT worldwide

Messe München's competence in organizing environmental-technology events is demonstrated not only in the world's leading trade fair for the sector, IFAT, but also in a range of other international trade exhibitions around the world. The spectrum encompasses IFAT Africa in Johannesburg, IFAT Eurasia in Istanbul, IFAT India in Mumbai, and IE expo in Shanghai. With IE expo Guangzhou there is now also a regional edition of the trade fair, focusing on the market in South China.

Messe München

Messe München is one of the leading exhibition organizers worldwide with more than 50 of its own trade shows for capital goods, consumer goods and new technologies. Every year, a total of over 50,000 exhibitors and around three million visitors take part in more than 200 events at the exhibition center in Munich, at the ICM – Internationales Congress Center München and the MOC Veranstaltungszentrum München as well as abroad. Together with its subsidiary companies, Messe München organizes trade shows in China, India, Brazil, Russia, Turkey, South Africa, Nigeria, Vietnam and Iran. With a network of associated companies in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America as well as around 70 representations abroad for over 100 countries, Messe München has a global presence.