

Oxo-biodegradable additive suppliers rebut critics

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PLASTICS NEWS STAFF

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA (**Updated** Feb. 4, 1:25 p.m. ET) -- A pair of oxo-biodegradable plastic additive makers have fired back at the Society of the Plastics Industry's Bioplastics Council over claims of biodegradability.

The Bioplastics Council had questioned such claims in a 5-page position paper released Jan. 28, saying that "the issue is one of claiming biodegradation where there is not data to support those claims, or to prove biodegradability as per accepted standards."

In a Feb. 1 rebuttal, officials with additives maker EPI Environmental Products Inc. of Vancouver, British Columbia, said the Bioplastics Council and a similar European trade group "are inherently biased against competing technologies, and ... have once again sought to discredit oxo-biodegradable plastics technology through their ongoing campaign of misinformation and rumor-mongering."

EPI officials battle on for five pages, disputing the council's claims and adding several claims defending its own products.

A similar rebuttal from additives maker Symphony Environmental Technologies plc of Borehamwood, England, was less polite.

"The increasingly desperate efforts of the hydro-biodegradable (vegetable-based or 'compostable') plastic companies to rubbish oxo-biodegradable plastics are becoming laughable," Symphony officials said in a Feb. 1 release. "Their latest tactic is to form themselves in the U.S.A. into a very official-sounding organization called the 'Bioplastics Council' and to attach it to the respected Society of the Plastics Industry."

"This 'Council' has recently issued a Position Paper which repeats the allegations made against oxo-biodegradable plastics in July 2009 by an organization called 'European Bioplastics.' Not surprising really — as they are financed by some of the same companies for the same purpose."

EPI officials had disputed similar claims made by European Bioplastics in August.

In response to the criticism from EPI and Symphony, the SPI Bioplastics Council issued a statement:

"The SPI Bioplastics Council's position paper on oxo-biodegradable technologies was drafted with considerable thought and deliberation, and was released on January 28 after extensive review and due diligence. We strongly stand by the position taken, and reiterate that it is the duty of industry to provide consumers with clear information supported by scientific data so that marketing claims do in fact match product results."

The Bioplastics Council is comprised of eight member companies: Arkema, BASF Corp., Cereplast Inc., DuPont Co., NatureWorks LLC, PolyOne Corp., Teknor Apex and Telles, the joint venture company of Metabolix and Archer Daniels Midland. Seven of those eight — with the exception of Teknor Apex — also are members of European Bioplastics, a trade group formed in 2006.

Two other recycling-focused trade groups – the Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers (APR) and the National Association for PET Container Resources (NAPCOR) also have raised concerns about oxo-biodegradable additives. APR in particular has challenged additives producers to produce evidence that their products won't ultimately weaken products made from recycled resins.

Steve Alexander, executive director of APR, said degradable additives have at least two environmental hurdles to overcome.

“First, do the additives in fact lead to degradation of plastic molecules to carbon dioxide and water? Doubts and claims abound, particularly about timeframes. While such discussions are interesting and necessary, we as citizens wonder if degradation leads to environmental benefit on its own or is degradation an environmental negative and initiation of new environmental issues. We believe the greater environmental benefit and sustainable action is to use the plastic molecule again and not waste it,” Alexander said in a statement.

“Second, and more pertinent to our interests in plastics recycling, we wonder how the additives affect the process of recycling, the making of the next item from recycled plastic, and the service life of the next item, Alexander said. “Premature demise of items made of recycled plastic which contain degradable additives is not helpful. The early failure of some items impacts the reputation of all.”

Alexander said APR is pleased that some companies, such as Symphony, have excluded PET as a targeted resin, and that some are proceeding to test their materials per the APR degradable additives protocol.

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