



**A planned plastics treaty is intended to control production and waste and to promote recycling.**

## POLLUTION

# A treaty controlling plastic is coming

## Countries also plan to form a global science panel on chemicals

Countries around the world agreed March 2 to negotiate a global treaty aimed at controlling plastic, from production to disposal.

“Plastic pollution has grown into an epidemic,” Espen Barth Eide, Norway’s minister for climate and the environment, says in a statement. But with the backing for a treaty from 175 countries, “we are officially on track for a cure.” Eide presided at a meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), the UN’s top decision-making body on environmental issues, in Nairobi, Kenya, where governments endorsed the creation of the plastic pact.

The planned accord, expected to be completed by the end of 2024, will cover the life cycle of plastics and foster the design of reusable and recyclable products and materials, according to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The agreement would also call for international collaboration to help developing countries access technology as well as promote scientific and technical cooperation.

The global chemical industry, the producers of plastic, backs the plan for a treaty. In a statement, the International Council of Chemical Associations says UNEA’s mandate for the accord “provides governments with the flexibility to identify binding and voluntary measures across the full lifecycle of plastics, while recognizing there is no single approach to solving this global challenge.”

Environmental advocates are enthusiastic about the treaty. Yet they also express concern that industry will oppose efforts to curb the production and widespread recycling of plastic. “We have two years to negotiate an entirely new treaty—an ambitious time frame—and a powerful plastics and petrochemical lobby will fight it all the way,” Christina Dixon of the Environmental Investigation Agency says in a statement.

In addition to launching talks on a plastics treaty, UNEA backed the creation of a science policy panel that will advise decision makers on the sound management of chemicals and waste and the prevention of pollution. The panel will examine chemicals that most impact human health and the environment and study how best to stop such harm, Inger Andersen, executive director of UNEP, told reporters at a press briefing.

The assembly also backed further UNEP work on a nonbinding 2005 agreement, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, which promotes chemical safety around the world.—CHERYL HOGUE