

# Is the US really changing its plastics policy?

A White House closed-door meeting left many questions, but environmental advocates are cautiously optimistic

Leigh Krietsch Boerner, August 22, 2024



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The White House said in closed-door meetings that the US might be open to capping plastic production.

In closed-door briefings with industry and advocacy groups on Aug. 14, a White House representative announced that the US is no longer against global goals to cap plastic production. This marks a considerable shift from the nation's previous stance on plastics, which focused on the preferences of individual countries and reducing waste. The White House briefings lacked detail, but environmental advocates say they're cautiously optimistic about the change.

Jonathan Black from the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) read from a prepared statement at two separate online briefings, one for industry members and one for environmental advocacy organizations. Sources present say Black announced that the US is now considering methods to curb plastic pollution that had been effectively off the table in the past, such as limiting new plastic production and putting restrictions on the use of some chemicals in plastics. However, he did not mention specific limits or note when any changes might occur. The White House released a report in July outlining a government-wide approach for addressing plastic pollution, but the document similarly lacks details on policies or time frame. The US is one of the world's largest manufacturers of plastic and the world's largest plastic waste producer.

[Reuters reported](#) the first briefing shortly after it ended, but the White House has not put out a public statement on the briefings nor their content. CEQ spokesperson Justin Weiss [told a Politico reporter](#) that there would not be a statement forthcoming. When asked to verify this or statements from the meetings, Weiss told C&EN by email that he could only confirm that the reporting in the Reuters story is accurate, and the CEQ had no further comment.

A representative from the industry group the American Chemistry Council (ACC) verified that they attended the industry briefing. ACC president Chris Jahn calls the US's position change a lose-lose situation. "The White House has signaled it is willing to betray U.S. manufacturing and the hundreds of thousands of jobs it supports," he says in a statement.

Environmental advocates are hopeful about what the US said in the briefing, but aren't ready to count it as a win. According to Jamala Djinn, science policy advisor at the advocacy group Break Free from Plastic, White House representatives said that they're open to conversations on pursuing global legally binding control measures on primary plastic polymers, chemicals of concern, and problematic unnecessary plastic products. But while the announcement was welcome, "I would not call it a policy shift," Djinn says. "It is more of a narrative shift than anything." The US needs to release a written proposal before advocacy groups take the shift seriously, she says.

Frankie Orona from the advocacy group Society of Native Nations says that the briefing included many sentiments environmental advocacy groups wanted to hear, but there was little clarity or context. There was no time frame and no information about new processes or procedures, he says. It also seems in contrast with government subsidies of chemical recycling, which requires virgin plastic, and ballooning US plastic production. The briefings came a week ahead of the next meeting of the United Nations Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution, to be held Aug. 24–28 in Bangkok. The final official meeting, INC-5, is scheduled for Nov. 25 to Dec. 1 in Busan, South Korea. .

Chemical & Engineering News

ISSN 0009-2347

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