

EXPERT COMMENTARY

Standards are powerful tools in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The 8,400+ global citations of ASTM standards globally reported through our MOU program include standards from a wide array of our technical committees. ASTM International's subcommittee on environmentally degradable plastics and biobased products (D20.96), part of the committee on plastics (D20) was organized in 1990 at a time when manufacturers boasted of making eco-friendly products without any verification of their claims. The D20.96 subcommittee now oversees 18 active standards on degradable plastics and biobased products with several more underway. Technical standards help demonstrate that risks have been rigorously assessed and that adequate mitigation controls have been established to enhance safety and performance and help consumers have confidence in the things they buy and use.

The amount of plastic waste discarded has galvanized some governments, industries and people against these polymers. Through its standards, ASTM International is working to alleviate these problems and support safe plastics disposal. This is especially critical in emerging economies where the challenges are more acute as a result of inadequate waste management and infrastructure. Clear definitions, through standards, of biodegradability, compostability, bio-based plastics, biodegradable polymers, biodegradable non-polymers, among others, are needed to assist countries to develop the regulatory frameworks needed to provide more sustainable outcomes.

Banning the importation and manufacture of non-biodegradable expanded polystyrene (EPS) food and beverage containers will set a policy direction for Trinidad and Tobago, in the first instance. Based on the Standards Act No. 18 of 1997, the country's national standards body (i.e., TTBS) is responsible for the development of compulsory standards, which protect public health welfare and safety, as well as protect the environment.

The Memorandum of Understanding between ASTM International and TTBS facilitates access to internationally recognized standards and technical guidance from leading industry experts to support the national standards development process in Trinidad and Tobago. The ASTM D6400 Standard was one of the key technical standards utilized by TTBS to develop a draft compulsory standard that would assist in addressing the significant health, safety and sustainability challenges posed by the proliferation of Expanded Polystyrene Products in Trinidad and Tobago.

Implementation and enforcement of the proposed compulsory standard assure its citizens that the alternative products being imported or manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago are monitored by TTBS. The first step in implementing a compulsory standard will be advertising the document for public comment before it is enforced. The compulsory standard will be aligned to international requirements as far as practical. Then, during a transition period, stakeholder consultations will be held as TTBS prepares their enforcement protocols. Open and transparent communication with stakeholders throughout the process will lead to marketplace implementation and acceptance.

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