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Plastics demand exceeds supply; business opportunities substantially increased: Technology Catalysts - Scrap

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by Michael Marley

The market potential for post-consumer recycled plastics greatly exceeds the current supply, a technical research firm says in a new report.

The belief that markets for recycled plastics are limited is no longer true, says Technology Catalysts in its report, "Degradable Polymers and Plastic Recycling Technologies."

The Falls Church, Va., company said the technology for processing of waste streams and adding value to recovered plastics has substantially increased business opportunities.

The study distinguishes between plastics in municipal solid waste and prompt industrial plastic scrap. For many years, the report noted, companies have reused plastic scrap from in-plant processing. Technology for reusing industrial scrap plastics is quite different from that required to deal with commingled plastics of varying composition from municipal waste.

While the supply of both prompt and post-consumer scrap plastics is growing rapidly as the collection infrastructure expands, Technology Catalysts said the demand for both is growing faster.

According to the report, Americans are moving aggressively to develop techniques to recycle plastics from municipal solid waste and are leading both Europe and Japan in recovering these materials.

The dynamics and cultural drives in Europe and Japan are different from the United States, the study said. The U.S. and Japan are at opposite ends of the spectrum with respect to recycling vs. incineration. The U.S. has much more land available for landfill than Japan. The Japanese favor incineration and emphasize recovery of energy values from waste.

In the United States, the report said, consumer-activist groups have lobbied against incineration, viewing it as a threat to air quality.

However, the study noted all three regions have active programs and can be expected to emphasize recycling.

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