

Speech by Venetia Spencer PCEP Secretary General

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and a very warm welcome to the very first annual conference of the Polyolefin Circular Economy Platform.

It's a great pleasure to have you all here and I very much hope that you have an interesting, entertaining and useful day with us.

I have both good news and bad news for you. Let's get the bad news out of the way first – although to almost everyone here today, this is hardly news.

The entire plastics industry is under threat. You only have to look at the media headlines across Europe, or listen to what European citizens are saying.

Plastic – in particular the pollution of our oceans and countryside with waste plastic – has become the environmental enemy.

And we, as the polyolefin industry, are half of the entire plastics industry.

If we don't change the way we operate – and very fast – legislators across Europe, driven by public support, will impose even more radical and far-reaching legislation on our industry.

If we don't rapidly change the way that we operate, with root and branch transformation, changes will be imposed on us – and they won't be made with our interests top of mind.

Even with this threat hanging over us, we all know to the very core of our being that polyolefins are actually key materials, which are fundamental to solving many of the environmental challenges the world faces today.

The Sustainable Development Goals, which the world agreed to meet by 2030 if we are to avoid planetary disaster, will never be met without using plastic.

Plastic – including polyolefin – is a vital material for decarbonising our society and enabling us to have high quality, safe, eco-friendly lives.

We can't do that, though, by simply throwing it away after we've used it. We must be responsible for the plastic that we produce.



The solution, therefore, both for our industry and for the environment, is to implement systemic change – from within – to create a circular economy for polyolefins.

We won't succeed in isolation, with all of the various parts of the polyolefin value chain changing their processes and practices independently.

We need to work together as the entire value chain, so that all of the changes complement each other and are interwoven with each other, thus transforming the entire system.

We need to learn from each other's successes and failures in order to change the system in the very short time left available to us.

This is where PCEP delivers.

PCEP is a collaborative organisation with three strategic goals: designing out polyolefin waste; keeping maximum polyolefin products and materials in use for as long as possible; and then recycling it into high-quality new raw materials.

We are a one-stop-shop, a gathering of the entire polyolefin value chain.

PCEP provides a forum for all parts of the value chain to work together, establish best practice, showcase products and projects, exchange knowledge and collaborate to innovate together.

Our membership includes companies and organisations at every point in the value chain: producers, converters, recyclers, waste managers, retailers, and brand owners – as well as all the other organisations that play a role.

You can't achieve this enormous, but necessary systemic change without working together with each other – and we (as PCEP) can't do it without your engagement.

There is a lot of wonderful innovative work being done by individual organisations and small partnerships in the polyolefin industry, but we need to connect all the dots to make sure that the benefits can be realised throughout the entire industry.

I'd like to digress briefly now, to talk about why I am doing this job, as Secretary General of PCEP.

What made me want to take on the responsibility and challenge of helping to drive this massive transformation of an entire industry?

Anyone who knows me knows that I am totally passionate about the environment.

If I weren't here, I'd probably be working for an environmental NGO – or, even worse, be one of the politicians who regulate you.

I have two very young boys and I want them to grow up in a clean and sustainable world – a world populated by the same miraculous abundance of wildlife that I have grown up with, both on land and in the oceans.

And here we switch to the good news. Things are starting to happen and we can make a difference.

Earlier this month, I was thrilled to take part in a clean-up project that had been set up by one of our members in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya.

A year ago, those same slums were piled high with rubbish and the streams that ran through these slums were completely clogged and putrid.

Plastic was the most visible part of that rubbish.

The solution was simple and obvious: to provide skips and infrastructure for residents in which to collect their waste plastic, which was then taken away and treated.

Residents embraced the solution wholeheartedly.

I met a young man who told me about how he works with a team of kids from 6am to 3pm every Sunday collecting the waste from his community and bringing it to the skips.

The difference this project made to the whole area was simply astonishing. You had to see it to believe it.

Today, the streams running through the slums are almost completely free of plastic waste.

Across town, a young entrepreneur has set up a successful plastic recycling plant, employing local people, ensuring better incomes for waste collectors, sorting and using the waste plastic to produce high-quality recycled polyolefin.

While I was in Kenya, I also took the opportunity to visit one of the country's National Parks. Here, I was even more thrilled to be able to see big cats, elephants, hippos, giraffes and all of the wonderful wildlife of East Africa.

When they're older, I really want my boys to be able to see this fantastic country and its beautiful wildlife too.

First, though, we have to turn off the tap of plastic waste. With more projects like the one that I visited – and with local infrastructure solutions driving a circular economy – I believe we can. Without them, we won't.

This is what drives me. And what I love about my job is bringing people together to find the solutions that will make it all happen.

So back home from Africa, and closer to home, what have we been doing here in Europe?



A year ago today, I listened in to your strategy brainstorm as you discussed what you wanted to achieve at PCEP. Then, just afterwards, in January this year, I became Secretary General. Since then, we have achieved a lot...

We have established PCEP as a legal entity (an international non-profit association) with the scope to transform the global polyolefin industry into a circular economy.

Our remit is to coordinate the entire polyolefin value chain's positions on everything that needs to be done to redesign our industry and engage with the actors whose help we need.

We have agreed a number of important and ambitious voluntary commitments, including our pledge to use more post-consumer recycled polyolefin in order to drive transformation towards circularity.

Incidentally, ours is the largest pledge made (a 1 million tonne increase) in response to the Commission's call for voluntary commitment to use more recycled plastics by 2025.

Our target in Europe is to reach 3 million tonnes a year by 2025 through improving the availability and quality of the recycled material on the market.

By 2030, we are committed to re-use or re-cycle 60% of collected polyolefin packaging and to ensure more than 75% of polyolefin packaging is actually designed for recycling.

Last, but by no means least, we've committed to improve the collection and sorting infrastructure to allow all this to happen.

We have adopted a strategic 2030 roadmap to meet these voluntary commitments – a whole series of activities built around the key pillars of work that need to be done.

We have also established Working Groups to drive this process forward as fast as possible.

The roadmap and the strategy have both come from you (our members), developed in the two-day workshop I attended in November 2018 and refined in meetings throughout this year.

Having established the strategy and roadmap, we have now also developed and agreed a work programme for 2020.

This is a living document and I look forward to continuing to work with you all as we bring it to fruition.

We have also put PCEP 'on the map', with a new website, a busy twitter channel, an agenda of speaking engagements.

And, today, we launch our new LinkedIn group to enhance member-to-member networking and knowledge transfer.



It will be a safe space for members to discuss ideas and share stories on our way towards circularity.

I'm also very pleased to confirm that PCEP is an official supporter of Operation Clean Sweep.

OCS is the plastics industry's voluntary programme to ensure zero pellet, flakes or powders are discharged into the environment.

Stopping environmental leakage starts at home and we encourage all of our members to engage, implement and support Operation Clean Sweep.

Last, but by no means least, we have been a hugely influential and active member of the Circular Plastics Alliance – involved in every working group and in the drafting of the declaration.

We were one of the first signatories to the declaration and we will continue to play a strong leadership role in the alliance. I'm looking forward to representing the polyolefin value chain at the first steering committee meeting next month on the 11th December.

PCEP itself is just a small organisation. We can't do everything on our own. So what do I need from you?

First, those of you who have been active with us all year – as well as those of you who are new in the room – we need you to formalise your membership of PCEP.

Please sign up now and be part of our future.

Our first AGM takes place early next year and you need to decide who among you will represent your specific 'piece of the circular economy', and so be nominated to the PCEP Board moving forward.

Next, we need you not to be just "members on paper".

PCEP is designed to be driven "by the members, for the members". Please engage. Please bring your expertise to the table.

If you just pay your membership fee – which will make me happy! – and then just sit waiting for something to happen, nothing will happen.

As I said, time is short. It's time for us all to act!

We have taken PCEP from a "conglomeration of the willing" into a formal organisation.

For that, we all owe a huge debt of thanks to the Founding Board for being so engaged and active in this process.

I very much look forward to welcoming the new board, but for now please join me in showing our great appreciation for the people who have brought us this far.

Finally, what's coming up today at this Annual Conference?

Here in Brussels, we elected a new Parliament in May and we are now on the cusp of starting the tenure of the new European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen.

This is the first time in all my years in Brussels that the environment is front-and-centre, for all political parties and for all of the EU institutions.

This is the context in which we are aiming to transform our industry.

So the next item on the agenda (when I finish in a few minutes) is a panel discussion to talk about this.

And I am delighted to welcome ...

Julie Girling, former MEP and currently senior advisor of Burson, Cohn and Wolf;

Paulo Da Silva Lemos, policy officer in DG Environment

David Baker, Chair of the PCEP Board

We'll be taking your questions using the Slido app (which is spelt exactly as it sounds).

So, if you don't yet have the app, please install it on your phone now. You can find more details on the table in front of you.

After that, Michael Scriba, who is the chairman of our Working Group on enhancing collection and sorting, will tell you about what PCEP is doing in this space.

In particular, he will discuss some of our challenges in getting hold of our materials.

Following this, a team from the Holy Grail project will present their initial results and next steps for digital water-marking.

These are really exciting advances for sorting – and beyond that for enhancing circularity throughout product lifecycle.

Then some lunch, which I'm sure you'll be ready for by then.

After lunch, I am delighted to welcome the CEO of Searious Business, Willemijn Peeters.

I have asked her to share with us her thoughts on circular economy beyond recycling.

Following her session, you'll be playing 'Circular Economy Cluedo' – a bit of blue-sky thinking about what else is needed to achieve a circular economy. Preserve the mystery and don't touch the envelopes in front of you before then.

After all that hard work we'll refuel with coffee. Or you can refill your new bio-PE refillable water bottle from the tap in the bathrooms, and perhaps take a moment during the break to look at the City Water project from Join The Pipe.

Later in the afternoon, we'll look at four examples of projects from our 2020 work programme, after which I will be giving the stage to a few of our members who are pitching for partnerships – highlighting some of the barriers and solutions to circularity.

Let's call it our polyolefin Tinder session.

And finally, I've asked our Chairman David Baker to close the conference with his thoughts on the day.

I very much hope you enjoy today. I'm sure I will.

I can't help wondering, though, this being the first Annual Conference, what sort of meeting we might be having in five years' time from now.

What sort of plastics industry – and polyolefins industry – will we have in 2025?

What will the world be like for my two boys, as they reach the age when they will start to consider what we, their parents, have left them?

I would like to think that, in 2025, my boys will trust that the things that we all buy in the shops and use in everyday life are not damaging the planet – and that this will be completely normal rather than being the exception.

I'd like to imagine that in five years' time, companies might find that they no longer need the role of Chief Sustainability Officer, because it has become an integral part of every role in their organisations.

I'd like to imagine that in five years' time, my kids will not feel the need to go on school strike to save the planet from disastrous climate change.

And I'd like them to know that they can buy plastic products, which have great environmental benefit and which are inherently circular.

And they can trust that in whatever system they are collected, the value of the material will be retained in society, without any leaking into the environment...

... That they can trust the circular polyolefin systems to allow them to benefit from plastic products without feeling any guilt.

This is not just an environmental challenge – it is also a huge business opportunity.

In fact, only business can solve it.



It is a challenge that must be solved through economic and business models, rather than by politics (which after all fluctuates from government to government), or by activists (who do an excellent job forcing us to look at the bigger picture, but just don't have the capacity to change the system).

We, the industry, are the only ones that can do this. We can't do it alone, but together we can create a new circular business model.

Thank-you – and I wish you a fun and productive day.

And I'm very much looking forward to working with you over the coming years.