



Savior and demon – the image of the material plastic has been changing with the seasons for many years.

Often, this was simply the result of a current event, or of the perspective from which such an event is regarded: while, in light of the Covid 19 pandemic, medical full-face masks were once

saviors of civilization, they have now become a nuisance as they are blown up and down the country by the wind. And that suddenly brings us to the topic of the circular economy.

The German Mechanical Engineering Industry Association (VDMA) recently set out its arguments in the discussion paper "For the sustainable use of plastics – in favor of the circular economy". The paper was produced jointly by several trade

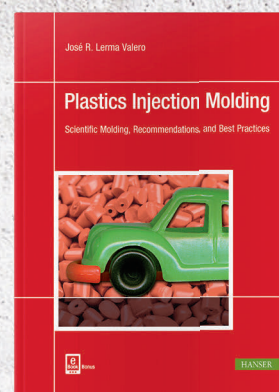
The Discussion Is Open

associations, including those for plastics and rubber machinery as well as waste and recycling technology. The VDMA calls, inter alia, for (temporary) product-specific quotas on the use of recyclates, in order to correct the imbalance between recycled and virgin materials. The association also encourages the introduction of assured quality standards for recycled materials, and a digital product passport for identifying waste plastics. It even demands a ban on exports of plastic wastes from the EU to third countries with lower environmental standards.

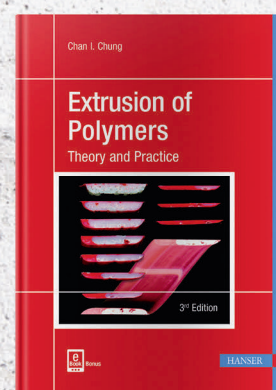
In its introduction, the paper reminds us that, in many areas, plastics are not the problem but part of the solution, as is made clear by watchwords such as hygiene, lightweight engineering and CO₂ savings. It continues, a circular economy presupposes that plastic products can be recycled after use and reused in new products. Both statements are correct – but do not detract from the crux: how can we effectively stem the careless or negligent input into the environment of plastics products that (like masks) cannot be recycled at all? Global problems such as marine littering must not be decoupled from the concept of the circular economy. Getting a handle on both these problems will take a huge effort and a lot of money. But a good image doesn't come free.

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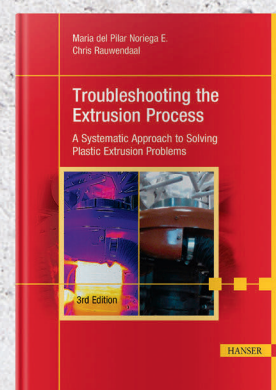
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