

## GUEST BLOG:

# SUSTAINABILITY - A SEASONAL PONDER

By Geoff Mackey  
Plastics Europe



Sustainability in our societies isn't simple, it's messy and complex and interconnected and hard. It's like trying to herd cats while juggling a bowling ball, a watermelon, and a live hamster. It's enough to make your head spin faster than budgets. And what the word means to who and when, is also perspective driven and situational!

But if we have an open discussion, can we then see and deliver some genuine opportunities for change? For those that have met me, talked with me and argued with me personally and professionally about sustainability, I always want to explore ways to engage people, so, sitting comfortably? Then let's begin! Seriously though, this sustainability thing is no joke. It's like a choose-your-own-adventure book where every path leads to a 'more' dystopian future. Materials, recycling, energy, water, food - it's a veritable Venn diagram of doom. And

**Christmas brings 30% more waste than the rest of the year:**

**Waste:** The UK throws away 13,350 tonnes of glass, 114,000 tonnes of plastic packaging, and over 160,000 tonnes of Christmas trees.



**Carbon emissions:** Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day account for almost 6% of the UK's annual carbon emissions. Cooking turkeys alone generates 14,056 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide.

**Toys:** By March, 41% of toys bought at Christmas will be broken and sent to landfills.

**Cards:** Only 1 in 4 Christmas cards gets recycled.

**Paper:** 50,000 trees are cut down each year to make enough

don't even get me started on the social justice angle.

Firstly, there's nothing remotely amusing about a range of topics concerning our world and societies disintegrating. When life gives you an impending environmental collapse, gather together and let the good times roll – opportunity awaits! Perhaps holding a debate, roundtable discussion or simple Q&A session can provide a learning opportunity (and some entertainment).

The problem is that anyone who's ever delivered a talk or written an article about sustainability will agree on one thing – talking about it is *really* hard. And let's be real, when was the last time anyone got excited about a pie chart? (Turkey or ham?) Getting people engaged and interested in something that could potentially change the future of many species is not easy. Especially if you need to discuss some facts with younger audiences who haven't caused these issues, and yet they are destined to deal with them in their lifetime.

There could be many reasons people don't engage with sustainability, but for many it has been a very abstract problem. But the world has and is changing, from the horse to the infernal combustion engine; the letter to the smartphone of our 24hr connected world, and then there's the seasons! Often people will imagine sad-looking polar bears, litter and maybe an overheating planet. But these images don't speak to personal experience for most, and therefore won't inspire action. But here's the thing - we are a special breed. We don't just sit around and complain, we roll up our sleeves, put on our thinking caps, and get to work. So, let's put on our best action hats and make sustainability the next big thing.

To capture people's attention so far, the overwhelming majority of sustainability messaging is negative because, naturally, scientists are worried about the long-lasting

#### **Firstly, enjoy the time**

Take a breath, take some time, consider how you spend time with whom...for both your sakes.



#### **Then consider...**

- LED lights, use a timer...
- Do you need a Christmas tree?
- How about ecards, personal messages or plants & seeds?
- Consider memories or experiences not 'things'
- What has been the 'costs' of your purchase?
- Consider gifts of time (or help), or handmade or baking

and irreversible effects. Also, anything that poses a threat to human existence is considered 'newsworthy' by the mainstream media and has a catastrophic tone, which is problematic because, at the end of the day, the message of sustainability is louder than ever. From composting our leftover dinners to trading in our gas-guzzlers for electric bikes, we're all finding ways to 'save' the planet. And as leaders in our community, maybe the opportunity is to help people better understand and take action...we can all make a difference.

If I have initiated thought, challenge and possibly action...for all our futures. So, come on, laugh, learn and make a few sustainable choices along the way. After all, what's the point of saving the world if you can't have a little fun doing it?



So...what conclusions have you reached or discussed to that?

**Dr Geoff Mackey** (trying to make sustainable choices as Santa)

*PS How bad are bananas by Mike Berners-Lee*

*PPS Time to eat the dog by Robert & Brenda Vale*



Opinions expressed by external contributors may not reflect RECOUP positions. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the contents of this publication, RECOUP cannot accept responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions.