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INFORMATION AND TRAINING CENTRE - WIDER CARIBBEAN REGION

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WE LIVE IN A PLASTIC WORLD

SUMMARY

Executive Summary: This information document contains a statement to be presented by Mr. John Kooijman during the World Environment Day 2018 Agenda Item.

Action to be Taken: None

Related documents: None

General

1. The following comment were submitted for presentation by John M. Kooijman, Curacao Maritime Association and delegate to the RAC/REMPEITC-Caribe Steering Committee:

WE LIVE IN A PLASTIC WORLD

Plastic is becoming a world ecological problem of the first order. This applies for land and the seas. Much discarded plastic ends in the seas and oceans covering 71% world surface.

The oceans are very important for human existence, they are the producers of oxygen and fish. Allowing maritime traffic which takes care of 90% of the world transport needs and many countries are dependent upon the maritime logistic network,

The world population is expanding rapidly, the seven billion boundary has been passed and the need for land and food causes the destruction of wonderful nature and wildlife. The increase of the average world temperature causes a rising sea level and low lying islands have already disappeared.

All these developments require attention of the world leaders, but in this presentation we focus on plastic.

PLASTIC

There are many forms of plastic, but the environmentally most damaging are plastic foils, sheets, bottles, straws, household goods, Bags and in particular small plastic items. Especially those for one time use are cheap and dangerous, but handy for daily use. If one goes to a supermarket, he or she will observe that between 50% and 70% of the drinks and foods, are in plastic packing.

Aluminum, carton, glass and tin contains the rest. All materials are for a one time use. Much plastic folie is being used to contain boxes fixed on pallets for easy handling and transportation.

Supermarkets often don't take care of discarding same properly.

REFUSE

In general most refuse goes with the official rubbish collection firms, which have to find a solution where to leave the many truck loads of refuse.

Till about a quarter century ago, Curaçao threw the rubbish in the Caribbean sea north of the island. At the eastern end of the airport runway there still is the %shute+. In the late eighties the Government sold orange colored plastic rubbish bags. After throwing those bags

into the Caribbean sea, many filled bags remained floating and drifted under the influence of the current and Passat winds in the direction of Aruba.

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These floating orange bags caused much confusion, when there was an emergency at sea: the crews of the Search and Rescue aircraft of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, were confused since orange is also the color of life vests.

The Government found a solution: the bags were now colored dark grey!

Ecologists advising the then time government to develop landfills.

At Curaçao there is a huge landfill at the former plantation named, %Mal pais+(bad land) and bulldozers cover the enormous amount

of dayly refuse with %biabaas+, which is a local type of soft broken light brown rock.

However, these landfills should be on remote spots with no neighborhoods nearby.

RECYCLING

Most people think that %recycling+is a new strategy. This is not the case. During the thirties of last century there was a world crises and purchasing power extremely low. Packing was paper, with exception of chocolate bars, which were packed in aluminum foil. These foils were

collected for recycling and gave a little compensation, when individual collectors turning them in at shops. In those years supermarkets did not exist in Europe. Now some local supermarkets have facilities to dump discarded plastic bottles and aluminum cans in special collection units at strategic places.

FUTURE USES

The enormous availability of discarded plastic, raises the question if these raw materials could be used for other purposes. In Amsterdam recently a plant was inaugurated that can convert plastic in fuel. This is the first plant of this nature in the world.

PRIVATE INITIATIVES

In many countries private initiative prevail to reduce the use of one time plastic utensils. In particular packing of a few ounces of cheese and sliced meat are amounting to a huge waste. This use should be stopped. Cruise lines are very active to promote proper handling of waste and they use incinerators to avoid pollution. Signs warn passengers to observe the rules concerning ones responsibility for a clean ocean and don't throw anything, whatever small, over board.

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A shipping company, which transport many local passengers, is the Norwegian line *Murtigruten*. On the second day of July this year, this shipping company will stop with using plastic for drink and food service. Everything will be changed to original metal and ceramics ware.

What this means is that no longer 960,000 plastic tea spoons and 390,000 plastic cups will be used on annual basis .

One can wonder, how much of this plastic stuff went overboard. Great concern are ships of so-called *flags of convenience*. The states where these ships are registered, in general do not have the manpower and regulations to check the correct use of the oceans by these ships. Fortunately Port State control checks frequently the compliance of those ships with the international regulations. Including disposal the various forms of rubbish.

I remember the procedures of rubbish disposal of ships during the Fifties of the last century. Two or three drums were tied to the railing of the poop (after ship) and filled while in port. At sea the drums were toppled over and the content thrown in the ocean! Times have changed, but other things of concern are still there. Shall we ever learn?

INTERNATIONAL LAWS

In particular the European Union (27 countries) are developing laws to curb the damaging side effects of plastic.

There are two priority items:

- A deposit on all plastic bottles, to be returning the empty bottle back to the supermarket, where the deposit money will be given back.
- Prohibitions to manufacture one time items for consumer use like straws, plastic spoons, forks, bags, small food containers of plastic foam and alike.

There are more countries with plastic reducing laws, like Curaçao.

This is a small resume of a very large item. I hope that the world population will curb plastic or otherwise suffer the consequences.

Written by John Martin Kooijman,
Delegate.