



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

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## Opening Statement

**Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

Subcommittee on Research and Technology Hearing:  
*Closing the Loop: Emerging Technologies in Plastics Recycling*  
April 30, 2019

Good Afternoon, and thank you, Madam Chairwoman for holding this hearing. I want to thank you and the Ranking Member for putting together this panel to draw attention to this important issue. Welcome also to our witnesses, and thank you all for being here with us today.

Plastics have become fundamental to almost all aspects of our lives, from food storage to 3-D printing technology, and have enabled us to make great technological advances. With this progress, however, comes a cost. Some estimates suggest that Americans dispose of 22 million tons of products that could have been recycled every year. We produce far more plastic than we can properly recycle, domestically and internationally.

The extent of plastics pollution is becoming ever more apparent and more alarming. Just last week, a study found that over 90% of the river flood plains in Switzerland, a country with one of the highest recycling rates in the world, were contaminated with microplastics. It is not just mountains and soil which are subject to plastics contamination. We have all seen pictures of large masses of plastics floating in the oceans and washing up on beaches around the world. A study in 2015 estimated that 8 million metric tons of plastic end up in the ocean every year. By some estimates, by mid-century, the oceans will contain more plastic waste than fish, ton-for-ton. While there is little research to date, we should be very concerned about the impact on human health of all of this microplastic in our environment and our food chain.

Complicating this challenge is China's ban on most imported recyclables. Too many American communities are facing tough decisions about whether they will need to cut back on what they recycle or even whether they can recycle at all.

The news is not all bleak, however. There are a number of promising new technologies and innovations across all steps of the recycling pathway from collection to repurposing. These technologies are being developed through collaborations that span the lifecycle of the material and include both public and private partners. The goals of these efforts are to increase the efficiency and availability of recycling, repurpose more recycled plastics into high value products, and ultimately, reduce the impact on the environment and human health. These are important efforts with a critical role for many of our Federal science agencies, as we will hear today.

In conclusion, I want to echo a comment by Chairwoman Stevens. As we look to improve recycling technologies, we must step up our efforts to reduce and reuse plastics through better technology and smarter incentives and policies. I look forward to today's discussion and I yield back.