

IELTS Listening Lesson 28

Setting:

You will hear a university professor giving a lecture to environmental science students about the topic of plastic waste and environmental policy.

Questions 1–6

Complete the sentences below.

Write NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER for each answer.

1. Around _____ tons of plastic are produced globally each year.

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for their products _____.

5. The circular economy model promotes _____ instead of disposal.

6. Many biodegradable plastics need _____ to decompose properly.

Questions 7–10

Choose the correct letter, A, B, or C.

7. What is one limitation of bioplastics mentioned in the lecture?

A. They are too expensive to produce

- B. They do not break down in oceans or landfills
- C. They release more toxins than regular plastics

8. Why was the Basel Convention amended in 2019?

- A. To regulate the use of plastic in food packaging
- B. To ban the use of all plastic in international trade
- C. To control the export of plastic waste

9. According to the speaker, what is a major challenge in implementing policies in developing countries?

- A. Lack of public awareness
- B. Poor enforcement and infrastructure
- C. Limited recycling markets

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problem

Script

Good morning, everyone. Today, we're going to explore a subject that continues to shape public debate, scientific research, and international policy: plastic waste and environmental policy. As we all know, plastic has become a defining material of the modern era—cheap, durable, and incredibly versatile. But as useful as it is, it comes with serious environmental consequences.

Let's begin by considering the scale of plastic production. Globally, we produce over 400 million tons of plastic every year, and unfortunately, nearly half of that is intended for single-use purposes—items like plastic bags, food wrappers, and drink bottles. Now, while plastic itself isn't

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but a massive accumulation of microplastics and debris trapped by ocean currents. Marine animals often mistake these particles for food, which leads to serious health problems or death. Some plastics also release toxic chemicals, which accumulate in the food chain and can eventually reach human consumers.

So, given this growing problem, what are governments and organizations doing in response?

Let's look at environmental policies aimed at plastic reduction. Many countries have implemented plastic bag bans or levies. For example, Ireland introduced a tax on plastic bags in 2002, and within weeks, usage

dropped by over 90 percent. Other nations, such as Kenya and Rwanda, have gone further by enforcing total bans with significant fines for violations.

Now, these are examples of market-based instruments—essentially tools that create incentives or disincentives for certain behaviors. Taxes on single-use plastics fall into this category. The idea is to internalize the environmental costs of plastic use. In other words, instead of society bearing the cleanup costs, consumers and producers are encouraged to take responsibility.

But taxes and bans alone aren't enough. Extended Producer Responsibility, or EPR, is another critical policy tool. EPR laws require

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reuse.

Another approach gaining traction is the circular economy model. Rather than the traditional linear model—take, make, dispose—the circular economy promotes designing products for reuse, repair, and recycling. Plastics, in this framework, should be seen as valuable materials that remain in use for as long as possible, instead of becoming waste after a single use.

Let me pause for a second to emphasize something. While policies often focus on consumer behavior—like avoiding plastic straws or using reusable bags—industry transformation is equally, if not more, important.

Large-scale change requires investment in new manufacturing processes, packaging alternatives, and improved waste infrastructure.

Speaking of alternatives, bioplastics are often touted as a sustainable solution. These are plastics derived from renewable sources like cornstarch or sugarcane. Some are biodegradable, meaning they break down naturally under certain conditions. However, the term “biodegradable” can be misleading. Many of these materials require industrial composting facilities and won’t degrade properly in the ocean or in landfills. Plus, growing crops for bioplastics can compete with food production and involve pesticide use, so it’s not a perfect fix.

Let’s also touch briefly on international agreements. While there’s no

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plastic waste from other nations—a decision that disrupted the global recycling trade and forced countries to deal with their own waste more directly.

Education and awareness campaigns also play a key role. Many governments fund programs in schools and communities to encourage better sorting of recyclables and reduce contamination in recycling streams. Even small improvements here can significantly boost recycling rates.

Of course, all of these policies face challenges. For one, there’s the issue of enforcement—especially in developing countries where waste management infrastructure is limited. Even where laws exist, illegal

dumping or burning of plastic is still common. Additionally, lobbying by plastic manufacturers can slow the adoption of stronger regulations. Economic arguments—such as potential job losses or impacts on small businesses—are frequently used to resist change.

So, where does that leave us?

Well, the reality is that there's no single solution to the plastic waste problem. Instead, it requires a multi-pronged approach. Policy, innovation, public behavior, and international cooperation must all work together. We must reduce the demand for unnecessary plastics, redesign products for sustainability, and improve the ways we manage waste at both local and global levels.

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meaningful progress.

Alright, that's all for today's session. In our next lecture, we'll look at case studies of cities that have successfully reduced plastic consumption—so please read the assigned chapters on municipal waste management before then.

Thank you.

Answer Key

1. 400 million
2. microplastics
3. tax
4. disposal
5. reuse
6. industrial composting
7. B
8. C
9. B
10. C

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