Press Release

“Everyone must participate in the circular economy”
- Stricter regulations accelerate the circular economy
- Quality standards for recyclate are indispensable
- Complete circular economy is shown at K 2019

Düsseldorf, 16 October 2019 – In view of the ever-faster increase in pollution of the oceans with plastic waste, Ulrich Reifenhäuser, Chairman of the Executive Board of the VDMA Plastics Machinery Association, has called upon politicians to adopt stricter standards and regulations. "We have to accelerate the circular economy and for this we need strict laws and painful penalties if someone does not adhere to them", said Reifenhäuser on Wednesday at a panel discussion of the VDMA at the beginning of K, the world's leading plastic industry trade fair in Düsseldorf. The circular economy inevitably leads to innovation. The higher the political demands placed on the plastics industry, the sooner technological solutions can be expected.

"Politics sets the tasks, but competition will be the driver", Reifenhäuser told Dr Joanna Drake, Deputy Director General of the EU Environment Commission. However, she pointed out that the EU Commission already sets the bar very high and will continue to do so. "We set high targets, but we are often held back by member state governments who think they have to protect their businesses from overly high demands", she said. Drake, for her part, called on the plastics industry to support the Commission on its ambitious path. She rated that what has been achieved so far as having been a success. For many people, the circular economy had not been an issue at all a few years ago. In the meantime, everyone involved in the plastics value chain pulls in the same direction. "The
plastics industry is today already part of the solution to the waste problem”, she said.

Quality standards will increase the proportion of recycled materials

Next, Drake intends to address the issue of product design in the Commission. There are still too few products made from recyclate. This can be changed, however, if later recyclability of a new product is taken into consideration already during the planning stage. She did not say exactly how this goal would be achieved. But she showed that she is convinced: “We need more products from the plastics circular economy that are available and also affordable”. Thomas Kyriakis, CEO of the Schwarz Group, is of the opinion that quality standards for recyclate are necessary for this to happen. Only then will it be possible to use more material, he said, whose group, as holding company, manages the Lidl and Kaufland retail chains. “Only five percent of recyclate may be used today in products from the food sector. But if the quality is right, it could be more. Only it needs permission”, Kyriakis said. Drake announced she will review the corresponding directive. "That's the adjustment screw with which we can change something”, she said.

Prof. Dr Hans-Josef Endres from the IKK institute for plastics and circular economy technology at the Leibnitz University of Hanover production technology centre in Garbsen also complains about the lack of quality standards from a scientific point of view. So far, processors have hardly been able to justify increased recyclate use, if they do not know exactly what goods they receive. “If you don't know what's in recyclate, you can't use it for high-grade products. This leaves many application areas closed to recyclate”, he said. Endres also pleaded for legal requirements, so that more high-grade recyclate comes onto the market.

Cooperation is decisive for success of the circular economy

According to all the experts, the circular economy only works if everyone in the plastics value chain makes their contribution and everyone cooperates. Four companies present this kind of cross-border cooperation at the K. The Californian start-up Bureo collects, sorts and cleans used fishing nets in Chile. They are then shredded by Lindner-Recyclingtech. The recycling specialist Erema then turns them into recyclate, which is then processed into new products at the trade fair by injection moulding machine producer Engel. "We show a complete circular economy at the fair. If the industry cooperates, we can achieve a lot", said Erema CEO Manfred Hackl at the presentation of the project in the VDMA pavilion. There will be more such cooperation in the future, because there is great interest of the various players in the plastics industry in
establishment of circular economies. "In this way, we can show that products in plastics also have value at the end of their lives", said Dr. Christoph Steger, CEO of Engel.

Further information: plastics.vdma.org

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In our world, plastics are indispensable. The downside is the littering. Carelessly discarded plastics products condense to form thick carpets, not just on rivers and seas, but also on land. A complete circular economy could prevent this evil and put the focus back on the benefits of plastics. In order for this to be a success, we all need to work together: processors, raw material manufacturers, mechanical engineers and recyclers, but also brand owners, end consumers and politicians. VDMA will shine the spotlight on circular economy at the leading K 2019 trade fair in Düsseldorf in October and show how closed loops can work effectively. Throughout the process, stakeholders will be having their say in the association’s daily programme during this international industry event.

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About VDMA Plastics and Rubber Machinery

More than 230 companies are members of the association, covering more than 90 percent of the industry’s production activities in Germany. Ten percent of our member companies come from Austria, Switzerland and France. The German member companies represent sales of EUR 7 billion in core machinery and EUR 10 billion including peripheral technology. Every fourth plastics machine produced in the world comes from Germany; the export rate is 70 percent. Ulrich Reifenhäuser, Member of the Management Board of the Reifenhäuser Group, is the chairman of the association.