

Masks and Gloves: the New Pollutants

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Pollution is one of leading cause of morbidity and mortality and was associated with approximately 9 million premature deaths globally in 2015, accounting for 16% of all deaths worldwide. Modern healthcare plays an important role in environmental pollution and in this context, for example, the healthcare sectors of the United States, Australia, England and Canada are estimated to emit 748 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalents per year. The dramatic increase in the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 pandemic is sure to worsen this scenario. Various environmental associations are involved in the collection of these waste materials and in the cleaning up of coasts and natural environments. However, even if disposed of properly, they either will go to landfill or be incinerated, further increasing global pollution. New ways to recycle PPE waste or to create biodegradable PPE in order to reduce its environmental impact are currently being studied. However, it is necessary to make people aware of the correct disposal of these devices. Just as people have shown themselves responsible in following the instructions of the government to contain the infection by staying at home, now they must prove equally responsible in the management of PPE that must be disposed of correctly and not dispersed in the environment.

UK-based waste disposal company Teracycle has produced “Zero Waste Boxes” aimed to collect and recycle PPEs, facemasks and disposable gloves. Once finished in the Teracycle boxes, the items