

Health Group

You are a **Science, Technology, and Society Academic Researcher**

Your Background and Biography

Can someone go from being a plastiphobe (someone who fears and dislikes plastics) to plastiphile (someone who appreciates and has affection for plastics) in a day? No, probably not. But your own strongly antiplastic views were shaken up quite abruptly because of recent circumstances in your life.

You grew up in the country and spent most of your childhood outdoors. As a young adult, you and your friends preferred camping weekends to keg parties. You are a longtime member of the Sierra Club and adopted a hiking trail near your home that you have been maintaining for the last six years.

Your fascination with nature led you to an undergraduate degree in botany. But you found you didn't love lab work. You preferred field work, but it was public policy and public engagement that truly held your interest. This interest brought you to a master's and ultimately a Ph.D. program in science, technology, and society (STS) studies. Your focus on the intersection of molecular science and public policy and explore how the tensions between the two get resolved. And you are no stranger to tension. As a social scientist, you strive to investigate environmental issues as objectively as possible. But of course you have your own passions, concerns, and biases. How can these *not* influence your writing? You were drawn to environmental public-policy issues in part because of your concern about how proliferating chemicals affect the health of the planet and all the creatures on it. You are particularly worried about plastic. When you look at plastic, you see a dangerous life cycle, beginning with the chemicals used in manufacture and terminating in the landfill or ocean where plastics will end up. And while plastics are in use, there is evidence that they expose humans to potentially toxic additives, endocrine disruptors, and other negative health effects.

This personal connection to your research became even more real for you three years ago when your child was born with a serious disability. His condition requires the use of breathing and feeding tubes, intravenous medication, and a wheelchair—all of which are packaged in or made of plastic. You are of course grateful for the medical technology that supports your son's life but also are concerned for any secondary health risks he might be exposed to because of the chemicals in these plastics.

You believe that strong regulation is necessary to limit further damage. The adoption of new plastics should be slowed until we better understand the effects they will have on the environment and human health. In your research you look at how these regulations have come to be (or not to be) in the past, and the relevance of these successes and failures on public policy today. Your extensive research has

made only one thing clear: there is a lot we don't know. Regulation is important as research continues to clarify the balance between risk and reward in the plastics debate.

Your Mission

Your goal at this hearing is to convince the Regulators to include the Health Group's recommendations in their final regulation. To make this argument effectively, you must

- Complete the assigned readings listed at the bottom of this page;
- Work closely with the other members of your group to develop clear answers to the Regulators' questions;
- Make use of as much specific information as possible to develop strong arguments that plastics need to be proven safe rather than assumed safe and that the only way to protect against the effects of toxins is to prevent the production of potentially toxic plastics;
- Read as much as you can about your position and the positions of the other groups; and
- Complete written reflections on your character, interest group, and readings as assigned.

Your Victory Objectives

- **You will receive 10 points** if the Regulators select your group's proposal as the final regulation.
- The Regulators will rank the interest groups by how well their goals are represented in the final regulation. **You will receive between 1 and 5 points** based on how the Health Group is ranked and how well the regulation reflects your goals.

Sources

Health Group Sources

- Case Study: Plastics and the Human Body
- Report on Bisphenol A, video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wXGrzDlcr8&feature=endscreen

Your Individual Sources

- "Surrounded by Plastic, NICU Infants Tested for Risk," by Jon Hamilton, National Public Radio, May 19, 2009
- Select **one article** from the bibliography on *The Case of Plastics* website recommended for the Health Group. Read the article and write two paragraphs summarizing the article and how it will be useful to you in the upcoming debate.