

Regulator: Expert on *Industry*

You are the **Director of the Division of Materials Recovery and Waste Management at the Environmental Protection Agency**

Your Background and Biography

You have always been an environmentalist. You began a recycling program in your school cafeteria, started bird-watching in grade school, and even have a “Tree Hugger!” bumper sticker on your hybrid. You imagine a world where human relationships with nature are restored to the way things were in the past, before gas-guzzling SUVs, swirling gyres of oceanic plastic garbage, and toxic chemicals in everything. With this in mind you began your career after law school with an environmental advocacy group.

As your career progressed, you began to recognize that your dreams of creating an ideal, harmonious relationship with nature were a naïve fantasy of youth. Any real and lasting improvements in environmental conditions would result not from overthrowing our entire system for something better but from working to gradually improve the system we have.

Your views on environmental issues became further complicated when you fell in love. You agreed reluctantly to a blind date set up by a mutual friend, but found yourself immediately enchanted by your date. Only halfway through dinner did you think to ask what your date did for a living. The response gave you a shock: “I’m a chemical engineer at a major plastics manufacturer.” You immediately began to question the judgment of a friend who thought you were compatible with someone responsible for the environmental insults inflicted on the planet by chemical pollutants, environmental toxins, and plastics.

But you maintained an open mind, agreed to a second date, and eventually married this plastic-producing chemist. You are still a committed tree hugger, as devoted to improving the environment as you ever were, but your understanding of problems and solutions is much more sophisticated now than when you were younger. In fact, your new, more realistic understanding gave you a hard-headed determination to make a real difference, and when you were offered a job as Director of Materials Recovery and Waste Management at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), you took it with enthusiasm and eagerness.

Now you have been assigned to the panel developing a new regulation to reduce plastic waste in the United States. You are aware that this is an opportunity to achieve a much-needed win for the environment by pushing for the strongest regulation possible. You also see a career opportunity here: by conducting yourself with outstanding professionalism, you can gain the attention of your superiors at the EPA and impress upon them your value to the organization.

Your Role

Your goal is to select a final regulation that will address the problems of plastic waste in an effective yet practical way. Learn as much as possible from the experts to ensure that you make the right decision.

During this hearing you should

- Keep an open mind. Allow yourself to be persuaded by well-reasoned arguments and convincing evidence.
- Find out as much as possible about the issues. It's in the best interest of the country and the environment that you are able to carefully evaluate the arguments presented.
- Facilitate discussion and cooperation within and among the groups. Your goal is to implement the best, most effective final regulation possible, not to make everyone happy. The best regulation will involve compromise between groups, so push the experts in that direction.

Your Assignment

You will become the expert on the Industry Group and report back to your fellow regulators with an evaluation of its position and arguments. Engage in the following activities as you conduct your research:

- Attend the meetings of the Industry Group to learn more about its arguments and to plan for the hearing. Remember, you are an observer, so do not participate in discussion.
- Write **two questions** you would like to ask the Industry Group during the hearing.
- Write a one-page analysis of the Industry Group's main arguments and positions. What are its main concerns? Which of its arguments do you find convincing? Unconvincing? Why?

Sources

Industry Group Sources

- Case Study: Plastics: An American Success Story
- "Interview with Steve Russell," video, vimeo.com/channels/465871

Your Individual Sources

- "Benefits of Plastics," by SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade Association
- Select **one article** from the bibliography on *The Case of Plastics* website recommended for the Industry Group. Read the article and write two paragraphs summarizing the article and how it will be useful to you in the upcoming debate.