Regulator: Expert on Health
You are the Director of the Science Coordination and Policy Division at the Environmental Protection Agency

Your Background and Biography
You have always been passionate about the environment. As a child you dreamed of single-handedly finding ways to stop pollution, save the whales, and plug the hole in the ozone layer. But as you outgrew the innocence of youth, you learned that change happens slowly, and it mostly comes from working within the system. You still wanted to make a difference, so you went to law school, studied environmental law, and moved to Washington, D.C., to work at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). You have been there for 15 years, and you’ve advanced steadily through the ranks of government bureaucracy. Two years ago you were given oversight of the EPA’s new Endocrine Disruptor Screening Program.

Though you leave the actual screening to the scientists, you have worked hard to learn as much about endocrine disruptors as you can. Though traditional risk assessment focuses on high-dose or continuous exposure, endocrine disruptors are much more subtle. For these chemicals the timing of exposure is critical, and low-dose exposure at the wrong time can be much more devastating than high doses over a longer period. Because it requires a much different approach than traditional tests for toxicity, screening for endocrine disrupters is difficult.

You are glad that the EPA has initiated screenings for endocrine disruptors, but you worry that people still do not take the issue seriously. The EPA deals mostly with traditional chemical threats like pesticides, asbestos, and lead paint, and the budget is stretched to the extent that less urgent concerns are often overlooked and underfunded. Though you believe the danger of endocrine disruptors is real and imminent, the evidence is not yet threatening enough to attract significant attention and funding. You are therefore pleased that you’re included in this hearing and that activists concerned with the health effects of plastics will have their voices heard. Though health concerns may not be addressed in the final regulation, the hearing will bring more attention to the issue.

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 Health 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 Health 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 Health Group during the hearing.
• Write a one-page analysis of the Health Group’s main arguments and positions. What are its main concerns? Which of its arguments do you find convincing? Unconvincing? Why?

Sources
Health Group Sources
• Case Study: Plastics and the Human Body

Your Individual Sources
• “Chemical Safety Bill Has Diverse Support,” by Maureen Swanson and Rebecca Roberts, Philadelphia Inquirer, May 5, 2012
• 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.