

Sustainability Group

You are a Pioneer in Plastic-to-Oil Recycling

Your Background and Biography

You are a nerd and you're proud of it. You know that the world of the future will belong to the people who can use their intellectual skills to help solve the world's most pressing problems. The news today is full of super-intelligent, successful innovators who improved the lives of millions of people and found personal financial success as a result. The geek, they say, shall inherit the earth.

Technology is your great passion and your life's work. In your free time you refurbish vintage mainframe computer equipment from the pioneering days of supercomputing. You love solving problems involving technology. To challenge yourself, you once set out to discern the patterns in the programming of *Pac-Man*, the classic video game from the 1980s. You solved the puzzle, and by making 30,000 precisely scripted movements with the joystick, you became the first person in history to collect the maximum possible score in a *Pac-Man* game. As a result, you're a charter member of the Video Game Hall of Fame.

In your professional ventures you have taken on challenges of a more serious nature: you have recovered data from obsolete and degraded storage tapes for the CIA and for Princeton University, succeeding where a number of your competitors had failed. Your newest, most exciting adventure is in recycling plastics—but not plastic recycling in the traditional sense, where you merely reform existing plastic into “new” plastic objects. Instead, you recycle plastic back into the petroleum base from which it was manufactured, providing consumer-ready fuel. The process that your company invented is so efficient and innovative that many of your detractors actually think it's too good to be true. Investors and financial analysts are similarly wary of putting their cash into your company because the promise of extracting oil from waste sounds implausible to them. But it's true. Your process, put simply, *works*. Plastics are made from petroleum, and you've found the technology that reverses the process.

In some ways you can sympathize with your doubters' skepticism. You're turning garbage into gold, and that might sound too much like alchemical magic for traditionally minded, conventional thinkers. True geniuses are rarely understood, let alone appreciated, in their own time. Just ask Galileo or Leonardo.

In any case it's not public acclaim that you're passionate about; it's the chance to change the world for the better. You're attempting to save the environment from plastic waste *and* solve the problem of resource scarcity by providing an ultraclean, efficient source of energy. Your personal story is your best asset in arguing for your position in this public hearing. The process you've invented is an elegant, timely solution to not one but two pressing environmental problems. The government should invest in this sort of creativity and diligence as a means to address problems, not simply impose regulatory limits. At this

hearing you want to promote your story as a lesson in what is possible, and explain how and why the government should use its influence to help you and others like you. You see yourself as a prophet of environmental salvation. And the publicity might not be bad for your business either.

Your Mission

Your goal at this hearing is to convince the Regulators to include the Sustainability 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 for your position that creative problem solving and innovation are the best solutions to the pressing environmental problems caused by plastic waste and fossil fuel-based production;
- 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 Sustainability Group is ranked and how well the regulation reflects your goals.

Sources

Sustainability Group Sources

- Case Study: The Future of Plastics
- "Interview with Paul Anastas," video, vimeo.com/channels/465871

Your Individual Sources

- "Reaping Oil from Discarded Plastic," by Michael Kanellos, *New York Times*, "Green Blog," September 29, 2011
- Select **one article** from the bibliography on *The Case of Plastics* website recommended for the Sustainability Group. Read the article and write two paragraphs summarizing the article and how it will be useful to you in the upcoming debate.