

Surrey academic to lead plastic pollution fight

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Tackling the plastic pollution crisis: Legislation must evolve to address challenges for our climate, ecosystems and human health

Urgent legislative action is needed to stop the imminent threats of environmental harms caused by plastics. To help find solutions, Dr Noreen O'Meara from the University of Surrey has been awarded a prestigious Mid-Career Fellowship by the British Academy to lead vital research that seeks to reshape how we govern the lifecycle of plastics through effective legislation and policy.

Dr O'Meara's project aims to support national, European, and global efforts to combat plastics pollution at a time when negotiations for a Global Plastics Treaty are intensifying. This treaty represents the first international legally binding framework aimed at addressing the plastics crisis, and Dr O'Meara's research will play a crucial role in informing its development and implementation.

Dr Noreen O'Meara, Associate Professor (Reader) in Human Rights, European and Environmental Law at the University of Surrey said:

"Plastics pollution is a toxic contributor to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, ecosystem degradation, and environmental pollution. Plastics production accounts for a rising proportion of the global carbon budget, which undermines states' net-zero goals and action under the Paris Agreement to achieve a safer climate. The plastics lifecycle creates serious risks to human rights and human health which must be mitigated in governance efforts to tackle plastics pollution.

"We must mitigate the serious risks to human rights and health that arise from the plastics lifecycle in our governance efforts. This fellowship gives us the opportunity to advocate for a rights-oriented model that not only addresses pollution but also respects human dignity."

With a strong background in EU and European Human Rights Law, Dr O'Meara's research delves into pressing challenges in climate law and environmental justice. She has been actively involved in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), which is working towards finalising the Global Plastics Treaty by mid-2025. As United Nations negotiations resume, her insights will be invaluable as states navigate the complexities of this treaty.

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