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Public Invited to Help Turn Everyday Plastic Waste and Recycling Obstacles into Policy Solutions

- Ministry of Climate, Energy and Environment launches contest for ideas to reduce unnecessary plastics and remove recycling barriers starting June 25
- Improvement ideas identified in everyday life will be incorporated into government policy following consultations with industry

The Ministry of Climate, Energy and Environment (MCEE, Minister Kim Sungwhan) announced that, starting June 25, it will accept submissions on an ongoing basis for its “Ideas Contest to Reduce Unnecessary Plastics and Improve Recycling Barriers” through the National Idea Platform (epeople.go.kr/idea).

Plastic is an essential material deeply embedded in our daily lives. However, when discarded without being properly collected and recycled, it can break down into microplastics in the natural environment or be incinerated or landfilled, resulting in greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, because plastics are made from petroleum, which is a resource that must largely be imported, they are vulnerable to the recent resource security and supply chain challenges, making effective demand management and expanded domestic recycling essential.

South Korea discards more than 21,000 tons of plastic products every day (2024 Plastic Life Cycle Material Flow Analysis). A significant portion of this plastic is used for everyday items such as packaging (32%) and household goods (13%). As a result, people often encounter products and packaging in their daily lives that use unnecessary materials, leave them unsure whether they can be recycled, or are inconvenient to sort for recycling, prompting a

sense that improvements are needed.

The contest aims to identify these ideas and incorporate them into government policy. It is divided into two categories: the “Unnecessary Plastics” category, which focuses on reducing unnecessary plastic used in products or replacing it with alternative materials such as paper or wood, and the “Recycling Barriers” category, which seeks solutions to improve factors that make waste separation and recycling more difficult.

The contest will accept submissions on an ongoing basis starting June 25. Going forward, a total of nine outstanding ideas will be selected and recognized with awards every six months.

* Three awards each will be presented in the names of the Minister of Climate, Energy and Environment, the CEO of the Korea Environment Corporation, and the Chairman of the Korea Packaging Recycling Cooperative, for a total of nine awards and prize money totaling KRW 4.5 million.

Submitted ideas will be reviewed by an evaluation committee composed of experts from various fields. Selected proposals will then be discussed with industry stakeholders and incorporated into actual government policy through mechanisms such as the Packaging Material and Structure Assessment System* and the Circular Usability Evaluation System**.

* Introduced in 2019, the system classifies packaging into four grades: “Excellent,” “Good,” “Fair,” and “Difficult,” based on recyclability, encouraging the use of materials and packaging designs that are easier to recycle.

** Introduced in 2018, the system allows the MCEE to evaluate products suspected of having poor recyclability, assessing factors such as recyclability, the use of recycled materials, and carbon emissions, and to recommend improvements.

Kim Go-eung, Director General for the Resources Circulation Bureau at the MCEE, said, “A circular economy is ultimately a process in which products that pass through the hands of every citizen are reborn as valuable resources and returned to everyday life. If members of the public share the innovative ideas they have in their daily lives instead of letting them go unnoticed, we will actively incorporate them into actual government policy.”