

# 2023 Pressure Pipe Conference: Safripol emphasises significance of sustainability

By  Sindy Peters

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Polymer producer Safripol recently hosted its 2023 Pressure Pipe Conference, exploring the various standards and use-case scenarios of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe. Nyambeni Luruli, polymer specialist at Safripol, presented the keynote discussion, addressing sustainability - a topic that cannot be ignored given the widely acknowledged global issue of plastic waste, he said.



Nyambeni Luruli, polymer specialist at Safripol

Due to its flexibility, low weight, resistance to corrosion, and low cost compared to other materials, plastic has seen phenomenal growth since its discovery, said Luruli. And if its wide use is to continue, the issue of waste needs to be addressed.

"As the plastic industry, we've got to do our part in terms of reducing our carbon footprint," he said. "Depending on where you are in the value chain, you've got to take certain measures to assist the world in eliminating plastic waste."

Apart from recycling and reuse, [downgauging](#) should be encouraged, he said, especially where it does not compromise the performance of the final product. Applications should be designed with a sustainability lens as we move from a linear economy to a circular one.

While in the case of high-pressure pipes, it's not encouraged to incorporate recycled material into their design as this could compromise their quality; the little waste generated could be used in non-pressure applications, Luruli said, allowing manufacturers to shift to a semi-linear economy. Ultimately, however,

the product should last and fulfil its purpose for as long as possible.



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## A sustainable industry, beyond 2050

Luruli noted that since 1990, plastic production has overtaken steel production growth on an annual basis, and the only time production volume decreased was in 2008 during the financial crisis and in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Factors that will support plastic production growth, even beyond 2050, he said, include urbanisation and population growth. Urbanisation will require infrastructure development, which the pipe industry aims to support, and population growth - particularly in Asia and Africa - is only expected to start tapering off at the end of the century.

"These are the figures that support plastic growth," said Luruli. "However, if we don't deal with the problem that we are facing as the plastics industry, we may not be able to take part in this growth."

## High-pressure pipe's low environmental footprint

HDPE pressure pipes, which are meant for long-term application, are highly durable, have the ability to withstand ground movements, and generate very little waste during their life cycle, explained Luruli. Research has also shown these pipes to have a lower environmental footprint than comparative metals such as cast iron, copper and concrete.

Safripol is currently conducting life cycle assessments of various materials, focusing on Scope 1 (production processes) and Scope 2 (utilities) emissions. It has omitted Scope 3 which deals with emissions associated with suppliers of raw material because acquiring data from those sources is a challenge, he noted.



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## 'Plastic Responsibly'

Unpacking Safripol's sustainability strategy, Luruli highlighted its three pillars: advancing the circular economy, reducing its environmental impact, and supporting communities within the areas in which it operates.

This has entailed moving its product portfolio away from flexible applications to more durable use, installing a 10MW solar plant in Sasolburg to reduce its reliance on fossil fuel-based energy sources, and supporting community recycling projects, education and skills training, and enterprise development.

Also part of Safripol's sustainability strategy is its '[Let's Plastic Responsibly' campaign](#), which promotes reusing, repurposing and recycling plastics for maximum utility and value, and to ensure they stay out of the environment. The campaign is open to public and private players, environmental/plastic organisations, communities, schools and individuals.

## ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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