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Biodegradable Polymers and Their Role in Sustainable Materials

Carlos Mendoza*

Department of Chemical and Environmental Engineering, University of the Andes Institute of Technology, Colombia,

***Corresponding author:** Carlos Mendoza. Department of Chemical and Environmental Engineering, University of the Andes Institute of Technology, Colombia,

E-mail: carlos.mendoza@andesmaterial.edu

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Abstract

Biodegradable polymers are materials designed to decompose through the action of microorganisms, enzymes, or natural environmental processes into harmless by-products such as water, carbon dioxide, and biomass. These polymers have gained increasing importance as alternatives to conventional plastics due to growing concerns about environmental pollution and waste accumulation. This article discusses the structure, degradation mechanisms, synthesis, and applications of biodegradable polymers in modern macromolecular science.

Keywords:* *Biodegradable polymers, bioplastics, environmental sustainability, polymer degradation, renewable resources, polylactic acid, polyhydroxyalkanoates, compostable materials, green chemistry, sustainable packaging

Introduction

Biodegradable polymers have emerged as an important solution to the environmental challenges associated with persistent plastic waste. Unlike conventional polymers that may remain in the environment for decades or centuries, biodegradable polymers are designed to break down under specific conditions through microbial activity or hydrolytic processes [1]. This property allows them to return to natural cycles without leaving long-term residues.The chemical structure of biodegradable polymers plays a critical role in determining their degradation behavior. Many of these materials contain hydrolysable bonds such as ester or amide linkages, which can be cleaved in the presence of moisture, enzymes, or microorganisms [2]. Examples include polylactic acid, polycaprolactone, and polyhydroxyalkanoates, which are produced from renewable resources such as corn starch, sugarcane, or microbial fermentation. These materials demonstrate that high-performance polymers can be derived from biological feedstocks rather than fossil fuels.Biodegradable polymers have found widespread applications in packaging, agriculture, and biomedical engineering. In packaging, compostable films and containers help reduce landfill waste and environmental pollution. In agriculture, biodegradable mulch films eliminate the need for removal after

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use, saving labor and reducing soil contamination [3]. In the biomedical field, biodegradable polymers are used in sutures, implants, and drug delivery systems, where gradual degradation inside the body eliminates the need for surgical removal.Despite their advantages, biodegradable polymers present certain challenges, including higher production costs, limited thermal stability, and the need for controlled degradation conditions in some cases. Ongoing research focuses on improving mechanical properties, optimizing degradation rates, and developing efficient large-scale production methods [4]. Advances in polymer blending, nanocomposites, and bio-based monomers are helping to address these limitations while maintaining environmental benefits.he growing emphasis on circular economy principles has further accelerated research in biodegradable materials. Scientists are exploring ways to integrate biodegradable polymers into waste management systems such as industrial composting and anaerobic digestion, ensuring that these materials degrade efficiently under real-world conditions [5]. As environmental awareness continues to rise, biodegradable polymers are expected to play an increasingly important role in sustainable material science.

Conclusion

Biodegradable polymers represent a significant step toward reducing the environmental impact of plastic materials. Their ability to decompose into environmentally benign products makes them valuable in packaging, agriculture, and medical applications. Continued research into material performance, cost reduction, and large-scale production will further enhance the practical adoption of biodegradable polymers in sustainable technologies. Next comes Polymer Membranes, materials that act like selective gates at the molecular level—allowing some molecules to pass while blocking others, a quiet but powerful idea that underlies water purification, gas separation, and even artificial organs.

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