Commentary

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Green Chemistry: Sustainable Solutions for a Resilient Future

Aman Jian-Junn*

Department of Chemistry, Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, Erzincan, Turkey

Corresponding author: Aman Jian-Junn, Department of Chemistry, Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, Erzincan, Turkey, E-mail: junnaman@Erzin.edu.tr

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Description

Green chemistry, also known as sustainable chemistry, represents a fundamental shift in the way we approach chemical design, production and use. It aims to minimize the environmental impact of chemical processes and products by reducing or eliminating hazardous substances throughout their life cycle. This proactive approach not only promotes environmental sustainability but also enhances efficiency, safety and economic viability across various industries. Green chemistry is guided by twelve foundational principles These principles serve as a framework for developing sustainable chemical processes and products. It is better to prevent waste generation than to treat or clean up waste after it has been created. Synthetic methods should be designed to maximize the incorporation of all materials used into the final product, minimizing waste generation. Wherever possible, synthetic methods should be designed to use and generate substances that possess little to no toxicity to human health and the environment. Chemical products should be designed to achieve their desired function while minimizing toxicity. The use of auxiliary substances (e.g., solvents, separation agents, *etc.*) should be minimized and where possible, benign byproducts should be used. Energy requirements of chemical processes should be minimized to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impact. Raw materials should be renewable rather than depleting whenever technically and economically practicable. Unnecessary derivatization (use of blocking groups, protection/deprotection, temporary modification of physical/ chemical processes) should be minimized or avoided if possible, because such steps require additional reagents and can generate waste.

Stoichiometric reagents

Chemical products should be designed so that at the end of their function, they do not persist in the environment and can break down into innocuous degradation products. Analytical methodologies need to be further developed to allow for real-time, in-process monitoring and control before the formation of hazardous substances. Substances and the form of a substance used in a chemical process should be chosen to minimize the potential for chemical accidents, including releases, explosions and fires.

Green chemistry is instrumental in designing safer and more efficient drug synthesis pathways, reducing waste and improving drug efficacy. For example, the development of catalytic processes for drug synthesis reduces the need for hazardous reagents and minimizes environmental impact. Pesticides and fertilizers are being developed using green chemistry principles to minimize environmental impact and enhance agricultural sustainability. Green pesticides, derived from renewable sources and designed for targeted efficacy, reduce pollution and ecosystem disruption. Green chemistry is driving innovations in the development of biodegradable plastics, sustainable polymers and environmentally friendly coatings. These materials offer comparable performance to conventional counterparts while reducing reliance on fossil fuels and decreasing waste. From renewable energy technologies to energy storage solutions, green chemistry plays a pivotal role in advancing sustainable energy production and utilization. For instance, the development of efficient catalysts for hydrogen production from water promotes the transition to clean energy sources. Green chemistry contributes to the development of processes for recycling and valorizing waste materials, reducing reliance on landfill disposal and incineration. Chemical recycling technologies convert plastic waste into valuable feedstocks, promoting a circular economy and reducing resource depletion.

Challenges and future directions

Developing and scaling up green chemistry processes can be initially more expensive than traditional methods, requiring investment in research and infrastructure. However, long-term benefits such as reduced waste disposal costs and enhanced public health outcomes justify these investments. Educating chemists, engineers and policymakers about green chemistry principles and practices is crucial for widespread adoption. Continued professional development and interdisciplinary collaboration are essential to drive innovation and overcome barriers to implementation. Regulatory frameworks need to evolve to support and incentivize green chemistry innovations while ensuring safety and efficacy. Policy measures such as tax incentives for green products and subsidies for research and development can accelerate market uptake and investment in sustainable technologies. Addressing environmental challenges requires international collaboration and commitment to developing and sharing green technologies and practices. Partnerships between governments, academia, industry and civil society are essential to foster innovation and achieve collective environmental goals. Green chemistry represents a transformative approach that fosters innovation, efficiency and environmental stewardship across the chemical enterprise and beyond. By integrating the principles of green chemistry into research, industry and policymaking, we can mitigate the environmental impact of chemical processes and products while promoting human health and well-being. Embracing green chemistry is essential for building a resilient and sustainable future for generations to come. In summary, green chemistry stands as a cornerstone of sustainable development, offering viable solutions to global environmental challenges through responsible chemical design and utilization.