

# Plastics and PETA

by David A. Chasis

**Y**ou wouldn't think that plastics and PETA (the acronym for "People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals" and pronounced like the Greek pocket bread) have a lot in common, but they most certainly do.

PETA is a non-profit advocacy group with a few million members and an annual budget over \$25,000,000. One of the group's basic doctrines is not to use animal pelts or other body parts for human comfort or entertainment. So where does plastics fit into the picture?

One of the first man-made plastics was cellulose acetate whose prime purpose for discovery was to replace ivory in billiard balls. And it did! Ivory is a hard material made from the tusks or teeth of elephants, hippopotami, walrus and narwhals. Ivory was also used for piano keys, bag pipe flutes, buttons, sculptures, combs, jewelry and other items. Plastics' growth has greatly reduced the need and demand for ivory, thereby saving the lives of thousands of the planet's largest mammals.

Another animal life-saving group of plastics is the flexible and resilient films and sheets of vinyl, nylon and other polymers. Many times these materials are used as replacement for the hides of such animals as cattle, hogs, deer, lizards, alligators and other animals in the manufacture of upholstery, shoes, belts, hand bags, luggage, clothing and football helmets to name a few. These synthetics are extremely cost effective and in many

cases may take a professional to tell the difference between the animal leathers and the plastic look-a-likes.

Another group of plastics, mostly acrylics, are used to make faux fur. This substitute looks and feels like exotic animal fur and can outwear the natural covering of our furry animal friends. If there is a problem with these fake furs, it is that at first glance it is difficult to tell from the real thing! This feature could lead to an over-zealous protester who may mistakenly throw paint on your beautiful acrylic wrap or faux bear rug. Also, when you purchase the next stuffed animal for a loved one, check out the cuddly fluffy exterior — yeah, it's a fur substitute — plastic.

PETA doesn't profess to be a spiritually-attuned group as the Jainists, a religion which began in the ninth century B.C. in India. Jainism believes that any living thing possesses a soul worthy of respect. Therefore, it wouldn't be much of a stretch for PETA to come to the defense of the innocent silkworm. To make silk, the cocoon of the mulberry worm is used by destroying the pupae before the adult moth emerges. This is accomplished by boiling the pupae in water or piercing it with a needle to simplify unraveling the cocoon in one continuous silk thread. Again, plastics to the rescue! The discovery, decades ago, of nylon and rayon as a replacement for silk has been successful in sparing the lives of millions of moths-to-be. Not only has silk been largely replaced by plastics but the replacement materials are more durable, cost less and have an inexhaustible source of supply.

To learn more about PETA, and the dozens of companies that use synthetic materials in their manufacturing as a replacement for animal parts, go to PETA's web site at [www.peta.org](http://www.peta.org). To learn more about plastics and their use in our environment, visit the American Chemistry Council's web site at [www.americanchemistry.com](http://www.americanchemistry.com).

In the world today, plastics seem to be in the gun sights of several environmental activist groups who seem to ignore the many benefits plastics bring to our planet. What better rewards can any material group, other than plastic products, offer when it comes to being responsible for saving the past, present and future lives of millions of earth's creatures? ■



*Can you tell the difference between real fur and fake fur made with acrylic?*

David A. Chasis is president of Chasis Consulting, Inc., author of the book "Plastic Piping Systems," and a member of and consultant to the Plastic Pipe and Fittings Association. He can be reached at Chasis Consulting, Inc., 329 The Hills Drive, Austin, TX 78738 USA; (512) 261-9115, fax (512) 261-3518, e-mail: [dchasis@austin.rr.com](mailto:dchasis@austin.rr.com), [www.davidchasis.com](http://www.davidchasis.com).



*Plastic replaced ivory used in billiard balls.*