Article type: Editorial

Home Page URL: https://www.alliedacademies.org/journal-pharmaceutical-chemistry-chemical-science/

Green chemistry in the chemical industry: Innovations for a sustainable future.

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Received: 1-March-2025, Manuscript No. aapccs-25-168726; **Editor assigned:** 4-March-2025, PreQC No. aapccs-25-168726 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 17-March-2025, QC No. aapccs-25-168726; **Revised:** 24-March-2025, Manuscript No. aapccs-25-168726 (R); **Published:** 31-March-2025, DOI: 10.35841/ aapccs - 9.1.180

Introduction

The chemical industry is essential to modern life, producing everything from pharmaceuticals to plastics. However, traditional chemical practices often involve hazardous substances, generate toxic waste, and consume vast amounts of energy. Green chemistry—also known as sustainable chemistry—addresses these issues by redesigning chemical processes to reduce or eliminate the use and generation of harmful substances. As global environmental concerns grow, the adoption of green chemistry has become a strategic priority for a sustainable future [1].

Green chemistry is built on 12 guiding principles developed by Paul Anastas and John Warner. These include atom economy, the use of safer solvents and reaction conditions, energy efficiency, renewable feedstocks, and the design of less toxic chemical products. These principles serve as a framework for scientists and industries to evaluate and improve the sustainability of their processes and products [2].

Catalysis is a cornerstone of green chemistry. Using catalysts enhances reaction efficiency, reduces energy consumption, and minimizes byproduct formation. In particular, heterogeneous and biocatalysts have gained attention for enabling selective transformations under mild conditions. Enzymatic catalysis, for example, is increasingly applied in pharmaceutical synthesis due to its high specificity and environmentally benign nature [3].

Solvents are a major source of waste and pollution in the chemical industry. Green chemistry promotes the use of safer solvents, such as water, ethanol, or supercritical CO_2, and the development of solvent-free or solvent-minimized reactions. Ionic liquids and deep eutectic solvents, which are non-volatile and often biodegradable, are being explored as green alternatives to conventional organic solvents [4].

Shifting from petroleum-based to renewable feedstocks is a key goal of green chemistry. Biomass-derived materials such as cellulose, starch, and lignin are being used to produce bio-based plastics, solvents, and fuels. For instance, polylactic acid (PLA), a biodegradable polymer derived from corn starch, is a sustainable alternative to petroleum-based plastics. This transition reduces reliance on fossil resources and decreases the carbon footprint of chemical products [5].

Conclusion

Green chemistry represents a paradigm shift in how chemical products and processes are conceived and executed. By prioritizing safety, efficiency, and environmental responsibility, green chemistry is paving the way for a more sustainable chemical industry. Continued innovation, supported by policy and education, will be essential in scaling up these practices and achieving global sustainability goals. As we move forward, green chemistry will remain at the forefront of efforts to balance technological progress with environmental stewardship.

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Citation: Zielinski M. Green chemistry in the chemical industry: Innovations for a sustainable future. J Pharm Chem Sci. 2025;9(1):180.

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Citation: Zielinski M. Green chemistry in the chemical industry: Innovations for a sustainable future. J Pharm Chem Sci. 2025;9(1):180.