

Recycling In America

What's Working, What's Not, and What We Do About It

May 15, 2025





## **Our Plan for Today**

Welcome! What's on your mind?

Setting the Stage: What do the data say?

**Perspective from the Field: Guest speakers** 

**Deeper Dive: Your questions & experience** 



**Recycling by Design: Exploring Definitions, Policies, and the Road Ahead** 





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**Recycling by Design: Exploring Definitions, Policies, and the Road Ahead** 

### **Chat/Q&A Support**





#### What must be true for the U.S. recycling system to really work?





Design for Recycling: All packaging needs to be designed for recyclability.

Ability to Recycle: All households need access to recycling in their home.

Public Participation: Residents need to fully engage in recycling.

Recycling Infrastructure: Recycling facilities need to effectively process the material.

Old Stuff → New Stuff: Recycling facilities need sufficient end markets.





## Our mission is to build a better U.S. recycling system.

The Recycling Partnership is a purpose-driven NGO.

We are a team of experts, practitioners, and thought leaders with the real-world experience needed to overhaul the U.S. recycling system through on the ground action.



### The U.S. recycling system needs all of us...





# Recycling by Design



### **Requirements of an Effective Recycling System**

There is opportunity to improve every part of the residential recycling system.





## Who gets to define "recyclability"?





#### ReMA Fiber Recycling Readiness Tool

Supporting brands and packaging in designing for recycling



Pathway to Circularity: Residential Recyclability Framework

## What must be true for a package to be considered recyclable?







Does the package follow the respective industry's design guide?



#### Access & Adoption

Do 60% of U.S. consumers have access to recycle the package?



Capture Journey

Does the package sort at a 90% MRF capture rate OR at a capture rate that is within a 5% range of the capture rate of the target commodity?





Does the package format fall into the relevant ISRI specifications?

Are end markets for the material sufficient?



#### Recyclability **Prevalence**

Does >75% of the package category (by volume or weight) pass all other Pathway building block requirements?

If any building block requirements are not met, there is work to be done to further material recyclability.



### **Designing for recyclability is not simple.**

#### **Recyclability is not determined by one criterion.**

For different geographies and different materials, there are varying frameworks, definitions, and requirements being implemented.

In addition to established requirements, there are also practical necessities – such as the existence of viable responsible end markets.



## When we approach designing for recyclability, it's important to take a step back and ask – what are we really designing for?

Products & System Scope	The Scope of Harmonized Safety & Sustainability Criteria for ILBI											
Figure 1   Biosphere   Products & systems intended to cproducts & systems intended to cproducts that can be circulated through biological processes)   Universal Reach	Safety Criteria Phased Risk Approach with Hazard Identification Criteria		Sustainability Criteria Environmental, Economic & Socio-Cultural Criteria									
	Human Health Criteria Categories	Environment Safety & Sustainability Criteria Categories		Categories	Economic Criteria Clusters		<b>Socio-Cultural</b> Criteria Clusters					
	CMRs (Carcinogenic, Mutagenic, Reprotoxic)	Lifecycle Waste Generation & Leakag (inc. Micro, Nano Leakage, Emissions of Chemicals of Concern)		Resource Efficiency (Water, Land, Energy)	Affordability		Social Equity & Justice					
	STOT RE (Organ Toxicity & Chronic Effects)	Pollution Along cycle	the Full Life	Chemical & Morphotype Toxicity	Local & Large Scale Applications		Just Transition					
Technosphere   Products & systems intended to be circulated in the technosphere (products that can be circulated through technological processes)	EDCs (Endocrine Disruption)	Nature Resource Conservation		Biodiversity Loss	Accessiblity		Cultural Impact					
	PBTs & vPvBs (Persistent, Bioaccumulative & Toxic)	GHG Emissions		Climate Resilience	Employr Market I	nent & Labor mpact	Fenceline & Frontline Community Inclusion					
	Essential Use Pathway Assessment	Is the product use, 'essential'? Can the product use or reduced in a des	/function se be eliminated sign phase?	How to identify safe & Is there sustainable alternatives to problematic plastic products?		Is there an exi life infrastruct where the pro system safe a	n existing system (e.g end of ructure) in the geography e product will end up? Is this ife and sustainable?					

One example of a broader scope to direct design for the environment and for human health is the work Ocean Plastic Leadership Network is leading with global experts to develop Harmonized Safety & Sustainability Criteria to support the UN Global Plastics Treaty.



#### Labels, Greenwashing, Misinformation

# Another important element of designing for recycling is transparent communication.



- 60% of people are confused about how and what to recycle<sup>1</sup>
- 71% of people wish there was an easier way to get info on what can and cannot be recycled in their community<sup>2</sup>
- 8 in 10 Americans believe in recycling's positive impact<sup>3</sup>, yet about half of all household recyclables end up in landfills due to confusion (roughly 15 million tons of recyclables)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Recycling Partnership US consumer study - N=1310, 2021 <sup>2</sup>The Recycling Partnership US consumer study - Labels- N=992, 2022 <sup>3</sup>The Recycling Partnership Recycling Confidence Index Aug 2022 <sup>4</sup>The Recycling Partnership Impact Report May 2020



#### **Opportunities for Improvement**

## How can we improve design for recycling?



#### **Policy – Harmonized Standards & Data Collection**

Truth in Labeling and EPR legislation establishes recyclability requirements that are expected to result in significant improvements to design and data collection.

#### Transparent communication and labeling.

Brands have a real responsibility to empower consumers to make effective recycling decisions by providing transparent, local, and up-to-date recycling information on their packaging.

#### System investments – from R&D to infrastructure.

As new and improved packaging formats emerge, systems infrastructure must keep pace to achieve full possible benefits.



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To achieve the environmental and economic goals of recycling, we must improve design.





## How?

#### Companies

Advocate for smart, well-designed policy, follow design guides, and invest in recyclability labels – like <u>How2Recycle Plus & Recycle Check</u> – today.

#### Communities

<u>Maintain</u> an accurate list of your accepted materials for recycling to support clear and consistent recycling information to residents.

#### Policymakers

Support and advance smart, well-designed policy solutions including <u>EPR</u> to promote sustainable design.

### **Mark Your Calendars**

#### May 2025

28	29	30	31	1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	

#### May 22, 2025

#### Part 5 – Policy

- Shaping the future of recycling
- 2:00 3:00pm EST

Join us for the fifth and final webinar of the Recycling in America series!



#### Get in Touch:

## **The Recycling Partnership**

- info@recyclingpartnership.org
- recyclingpartnership.org



We're a purpose-driven organization committed to building a better recycling system that delivers economic and environmental benefits for communities and the industry.

# **Appendix: EPR Definitions** of Recyclability



#### What does "recyclability" mean under current recycling policies?

One of the key provisions of any recycling policy is the definition of *recyclability* – what can be called recyclable, how does it earn that designation, what happens if non-recyclable products or packaging are labeled as such?

Let's take a closer look at a few states which have legislatively defined recyclability:

**California** – Passed <u>SB 343</u> which prohibits the use of the chasing arrows, or any other indicator of recyclability, on products and packaging unless certain criteria are met.

- In the beginning of April 2025, <u>CalRecycle released their material characterization study</u> which set forward their initial determination of materials within California which may or may not be labeled recyclable
- To conduct this material characterization study, CalRecycle used the following criteria:
  - Materials are accepted for collection by jurisdiction recycling programs.
  - Materials are sorted into defined streams by large volume transfer/processing facilities.
  - Materials are sent to a reclaimer and reclaimed consistent with the Basel Convention.
  - Materials meet specific composition and design requirements.

**Colorado** – Passed <u>HB 22-1355</u> which creates an extended producer responsibility (EPR) program. Under this program the producer responsibility organization (PRO) must create a minimum recyclable list (MRL) which is developed based on:

- The availability of recycling services, recycling collection and processing infrastructure, and recycling end markets for covered materials, as determined by the needs assessment.
- This MRL will be collected for all residents throughout Colorado.



#### What does "recyclability" mean under current recycling policies?

Maine – Passed LD 1541 which creates and EPR program. This legislation defines "readily recyclable" as packaging material that:

- Can be sorted by entities that process recyclable material generated within Maine.
- Has a consistent market for purchase.
  - "Consistent market" means that entities processing recyclable material are willing to purchase full bales of that type of fully sorted packaging material in quantities equivalent to the supply of that fully sorted packaging material.

**Maryland** – One of the newest EPR laws passed is Maryland's <u>SB 901</u>. This legislation creates an EPR system and mandates the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) to create a statewide list of covered materials. As we are seeing more harmonization amongst EPR laws at the state level, Maryland's list will be determined by the same criteria as Minnesota's list laid out below.

**Minnesota** – Passed <u>HF 3911</u> which creates an EPR program. Under this program the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) must create a curbside recyclables and compostables list. In the development of this list, they may consider the following:

- Current availability of recycling and composting collection services.
- Recycling and composting processing infrastructure.
- Capacity and technology for sorting covered materials.
- Whether a covered material is of a type and form that is regularly sorted and aggregated into defined streams for recycling.
- Availability of responsible markets.
- Presence and amount of processing residuals, contamination, and toxic substances.
- Quantity of covered material estimated to be available and recoverable.



**Oregon** – Within Oregon's <u>SB 582</u> law, which established their EPR program, is the Truth in Labeling Task Force. This task force was formed to study and evaluate misleading or confusing claims regarding the recyclability of products and packaging. The legislation also mandated the creation of a uniform statewide collection list (USCL) considering these factors:

- Stability, maturity, accessibility and viability of responsible end markets.
- Environmental health and safety considerations.
- Anticipated yield loss for the material during the recycling process.
- The material's compatibility with existing recycling infrastructure.
- The amount of the material available.
- The practicalities of sorting and storing the material.
- Contamination.
- The ability for waste generators to easily identify and properly prepare the material.
- Economic factors.
- Environmental factors from a life cycle perspective.

**Washington** – The most recent EPR bill which has passed is Washington's SB 5284. This bill followed Oregon's model and adopted many of the same criteria for determining what is on the statewide collection list. In creating this list, the department must distinguish between:

- Materials determined to be suitable for residential recycling collection, either commingled or separate.
- Materials determined to be suitable for residential composting collection.
- Materials suitable for public place collection.
- Materials suitable for alternative collection.

