

## Overview of US EPA's Materials Economy Efforts

Last updated: February 27, 2019

### America Recycles Day Summit Overview

Between August and October 2018, EPA held one-on-one and small roundtable conversations with stakeholders including recyclers, brands, industry associations, and state and local government associations to identify key challenges facing the U.S. recycling system and ways for EPA to support stakeholders' efforts. EPA used this information to develop a pledge for participants to sign at the America Recycles Day (ARD) Summit, which was held on November 15, 2018, at EPA Headquarters in Washington, DC. Acting Administrator Wheeler hosted senior-level executives from over 45 organizations in a dialogue to discuss the current challenges facing and opportunities to enhance the U.S. recycling system.

### AMERICA RECYCLES DAY 2018 PLEDGE

*In recognition of this America Recycles Day, November 15, 2018, we, the undersigned, pledge to work together to build on our existing efforts to address the challenges facing our nation's recycling system and identify solutions that create a more resilient materials economy and protect the environment. Our signatures indicate the interest and willingness of our organizations to participate in an ongoing dialogue over the next year to identify specific actions that we can take collectively and within our respective organizations to improve the nation's recycling system.*

### EPA's Materials Economy Action Areas

As a result of the dialogues leading up to and at the ARD Summit, EPA identified four action areas to help the U.S. recycling system contend with the challenges it faces:

1. **Education & Outreach**: Most Americans want to recycle; they believe recycling provides an opportunity for them to be responsible caretakers of the earth. However, it can be difficult for consumers to understand what materials can be recycled, how materials can be recycled, and where to recycle different materials. This confusion often leads to placing recyclables in the trash or throwing trash in the recycling bin/cart, which contaminates recyclable material streams or contributes to disposal of otherwise valuable material.

The development of effective, adaptive, and coordinated outreach and education strategies for consumers, federal, local, tribal, and state governments is critical to promote consistent behaviors that will improve the quality and quantity of materials that Americans recycle and result in improved markets for recyclable materials and increased demand for products with recycled content.

2. **Enhancing Materials Management Infrastructure**: America's existing recycling infrastructure has not kept pace with today's recyclables stream. Manufacturers of new materials and products do not always consider the full life-cycle of products and materials and may not communicate effectively with the recycling industry, which impairs the ability of the recycling industry to prepare for and optimally manage the recycling of new materials.

The increased cost of processing combined with lower market prices and the inability to quickly move material leads to increased landfilling of recyclables, loss of revenue to jurisdictions, and decreased recycling rates. New investments in infrastructure are needed to help meet the nation's materials management needs and foster a more resilient solid waste system capable of withstanding pressures from disruptions.

3. **Strengthening Secondary Materials Markets:** The rise of import bans on recycled materials has accelerated the need to improve domestic markets for recycled materials and recyclable products, as well as to integrate recycled materials and end-of-life management better into product and packaging designs. The closure of foreign markets for recyclable materials has fundamentally changed the assumptions governing the economics of recycling.

A stronger domestic recycling market will support local communities by creating more jobs and provide the overall U.S. economy with greater resilience and self-reliance. Municipalities will achieve cost savings when the markets for recycled materials are improved.

4. **Enhancing Measurement:** Inconsistent definitions and ways of measuring recycling rates across the country make it more challenging to set goals and track progress. Stakeholders across the system agree that more consistent measurement methodologies are needed for waste issues.

Standardizing and aligning measurement as well as tracking of recyclable materials will help better inform policy decisions and investments and help us determine whether we are making progress in improving recyclable materials management in the U.S.

#### **Post-ARD Convening: Action Area Work Groups and In-Person Meetings**

EPA has convened four work groups around these action areas. The work groups are comprised of stakeholders across the recycling system. Work groups met throughout February 2019 to begin developing strategies for each action area and will continue meeting throughout March and April 2019. The goal is to have a draft national framework for advancing the US recycling system in April.