



By Electronic Mail

June 29, 2022

Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tonko, Ranking Member McKinley and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding the timely and important hearing, "No Time to Waste: Solutions for America's Broken Recycling System." We commend the subcommittee for its leadership on waste and recycling issues and for fostering innovative legislative solutions, like H.R. 8059, the "Recycling and Composting Accountability Act," and H.R. 8183, the "Recycling Infrastructure and Accessibility Act of 2022." We write today to detail our concerns with the U.S. recycling system and to highlight the need for standardization, starting with definitions of recyclability.

Consumer Brands Association (CBA) is a trade association for manufacturers of consumer packaged goods (CPG), representing the food, beverage, cleaning and personal care products that American consumers depend on every day. A core focus of our organization is promoting policies that will fix the broken recycling system and reduce waste. As part of this effort, we launched the [Recycling Leadership Council](#) — uniting a diverse group of stakeholders from consumer-facing industries and the packaging and recycling ecosystem — and formulated the [Blueprint for America's Recycling System](#), a vision for ambitious federal policy action that recommends scalable solutions for a modern and standardized recycling system. Our work builds upon the ambitious sustainability initiatives of CPG companies, who are working to increase recyclable content, minimize packaging and support reusability.

In our view, the American recycling *system* is hardly a system at all. A system is [a set of interconnected parts](#) organized within a defined boundary to provide functionality or utility.

In the U.S., municipalities and counties determine how we recycle. This local authority means that individual recycling programs are piecemeal, established and run town-by-town and county-by-county, often without coordination between neighboring towns or across states and regions. Each locality has its own rules for what products are collected for recycling, when and how often, confusing consumers across the nation's nearly 10,000 different recycling programs. Notably, confusion around what can and can't be recycled, coupled with contamination, are two of the limiting factors on the amount of high-quality, available recycled material. Without meaningful leadership and guidance from the federal government, the localization of recycling has led to a system devoid of interconnectedness or harmonization.

The problem with America's piecemeal approach to recycling is apparent when one examines how we define "recycling." As part of the Environmental Protection Agency's 2019 America

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Recycles Day stakeholder meetings, the Environmental Research & Education Foundation found 18 different definitions of recyclable or recycling across the states.

The subcommittee must make recycling standardization a priority. The current patchwork of recycling systems in the U.S. prevents economies of scale, hinders innovation and contributes to consumer confusion. By standardizing the recycling system, more and different types of materials can be collected for reuse, consumer education efforts can be broad and impactful and, importantly, data can be compared across localities to solve problems or emulate best practices. It is not only a bipartisan issue but also what consumers want: [93% of consumers](#) said that uniform, national recycling standards will alleviate confusion.

As the first step towards standardization, we urge the subcommittee to:

- (a) Direct the EPA, in coordination with other agencies, to establish a single, national definition for the terms “recycling” and “recyclable.” These definitions would be implemented across all agencies, including the Federal Trade Commission and Food and Drug Administration.
- (b) Grant additional authority to the Federal Trade Commission to enforce the use of recyclability claims on products or packaging via the agency’s Green Guides, once a single, national definition of the terms “recycling” and “recyclable” has been established.

CPG companies across the country have committed to designing and implementing recyclable packaging, incorporating more recycled content into packaging and providing recycling guidance to consumers. We urge the federal government to join industry in reimagining recycling as we know it today. Through federal leadership, we can harmonize our country’s recycling system and help achieve the circular economy our planet desperately needs.

We thank you for your commitment and welcome an ongoing dialogue on American recycling. To discuss further, please reach out to me (jhewitt@consumerbrandsassociation.org) at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Hewitt'.

John Hewitt
Vice President, Packaging Sustainability
Consumer Brands Association