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**BEFORE THE  
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES SUBCOMMITTEE**

**February 5, 2020**

Good afternoon Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and to the Members of the Subcommittee. I am Peter Wright, Assistant Administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Land and Emergency Management, or OLEM. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss how EPA is working to ensure a successful future for America's recycling system.

I'm delighted to share with you today more information about EPA's comprehensive, historic recycling initiative – what we call *America Recycles*. In November 2019, after more than one year of collaboration with stakeholders from across the recycling system, EPA released the *National Framework for Advancing the U.S. Recycling System* at our second annual America Recycles Summit.<sup>1</sup> The *National Framework* summarizes our *America Recycles* efforts to date and charts a collaborative path forward to create a more resilient domestic recycling system. The *America Recycles* initiative is EPA's most recent effort to advance sustainable materials management. It leverages the relationships established through the Agency's long history of successful partnering with diverse stakeholders in voluntary programs such as WasteWise, the Electronics Challenge, and the Reducing Food Waste initiative. EPA continues to strengthen and maintain effective relationships with different sectors of the U.S. economy to conserve materials and resources, and to generate positive environmental results – all through non-regulatory activities.

While EPA does not have statutory authority to comprehensively regulate the domestic recycling system, the Agency – specifically, OLEM's Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery – provides the expertise and leadership to identify and address the recycling challenges facing the country. EPA's tools, information and technical assistance have helped stakeholders across the recycling system identify methods for improving infrastructure and efficiency in the market for decades.

Recycling, as part of overall resource conservation and management, is an important aspect of the nation's economic stability and protection of our environment and a priority for EPA. EPA is

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *National Framework for Advancing the U.S. Recycling System* (Nov. 2019), [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2019-11/documents/national\\_framework.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2019-11/documents/national_framework.pdf).

committed to helping guide and develop the nation's domestic recycling infrastructure to be competitive in a changing international system. According to EPA's 2016 *Recycling Economic Information* report, the U.S. recycling industry provides more than 757,000 jobs and \$6.7 billion annually in tax revenues. We know that as much as \$9 billion worth of materials are discarded annually and that there are substantial revenue opportunities to be gained from recycling.<sup>2</sup> It is important to keep valuable materials out of landfills by recovering them and putting them back to productive use, but significant challenges exist in achieving this goal.

Our nation's recycling infrastructure is outdated and ill-equipped to handle the diverse waste streams of today, and consumers are often confused about how to recycle, resulting in non-recyclable materials entering the recycling stream. Domestic markets for recycled materials and products are lacking, while costs for managing some recycling programs around the country are on the rise. At the same time, different state and municipal approaches to defining, tracking, and measuring recycling is impacting our ability to set goals and track progress nationally. EPA is working to identify methods to increase the adaptability, resiliency, and economic competitiveness of our domestic recycling system. And that is why our *America Recycles* effort presents such a significant opportunity for us to move the needle on recycling.

While the import restrictions recently imposed by China and other countries are not the cause of our nation's recycling challenges, they have highlighted the challenges of managing our recyclable materials in the United States. Addressing these challenges is the heart of EPA's *America Recycles* initiative. Actions being taken by EPA and partners under the *National Framework* focus on promoting education and outreach, enhancing infrastructure, developing markets, and improving measurement.

EPA recognizes that outreach and education to consumers and manufacturers is vital to the future of managing materials across the country. For example, participants in EPA's longstanding WasteWise program, which celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2019, have collectively prevented 247 million tons of materials from landfill disposal and incineration. WasteWise provides tools, technical assistance, and educational materials to participants to assist them with achieving their waste diversion goals. EPA's Electronics Challenge recognizes electronics manufacturers, brand owners, and retailers who increase their collection of electronic equipment for reuse and recycling using third-party certified recyclers, which helps ensure proper end-of-life management of e-waste.

As part of EPA's focus on reducing food waste, EPA joined with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration to designate April 2019 as "Winning on Reducing Food Waste" month. The Winning on Reducing Food Waste Initiative is a collaborative effort among the federal agencies to educate and engage consumers on the need to reduce food loss and waste. In 2019, with resources provided by Congress, EPA awarded the first round of grants to organizations to support anaerobic digestion of food waste, and we look forward to announcing additional funding opportunities later this year.

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2017 Fact Sheet* (Nov. 2019), [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2019-11/documents/2017\\_facts\\_and\\_figures\\_fact\\_sheet\\_final.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2019-11/documents/2017_facts_and_figures_fact_sheet_final.pdf).

EPA has been and will continue to be actively engaged with stakeholders across these systems, including state and municipal governments, recyclers, non-profits, trade associations, and manufacturers, to identify and address the major challenges ahead. These collective efforts elevate the importance of waste management and resource conservation issues.

EPA remains committed to inspiring, investing and taking action across the American recycling system. The *National Framework* is the foundation on which additional actions can be identified and taken by EPA and stakeholders. EPA will share a National Recycling Strategy with Congress and the public later this year. We will include national recycling goals developed in collaboration with our *America Recycles* partners and the public. Our collective efforts to create systemic change will achieve resource conservation and create greater opportunities for economic growth, healthier communities, and environmental prosperity.

EPA appreciates the Subcommittee's interest in strengthening America's recycling system. Thank you for your time today and I look forward to answering your questions.