



ANNUAL REPORT 2021



ambr

Alliance of Mission-Based Recyclers

ABOUT US

We are a coalition founded by four of the original pioneers of mission-driven, community-based recycling in the US. Together we are guiding new recycling policies and infrastructure investments to expand credible, transparent recycling systems that serve as a bridge toward a circular economy and just, resilient local communities.

Founding Members



Founded in 1969, the **Ecology Center** is a nonprofit organization located in Berkeley, California that focuses on improving the health and the environmental impacts of urban residents.



Founded in 1977, **Recycle Ann Arbor (RAA)** is nationally recognized as a leader in providing community-based recycling services.



Founded in 1976, **Eco-Cycle** innovates, implements, and advocates for local and global Zero Waste solutions to foster a more sustainable, regenerative, equitable and climate-resilient future.



Founded in 2001, **Eureka Recycling** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit social enterprise based in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, with over 100 employees and \$14 million per year in revenue.

LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP



Ask anyone in the recycling industry, and they will tell you—we are in unprecedented times! Never before have we seen such a wave of public interest, activism, stakeholder engagement, and policies focused on or intersecting with recycling. At the same time, we face ever-pressing global crises of climate change, ecosystem collapse, and toxic pollution. We are devouring and despoiling the planet at an ever-increasing pace.

With this abundance of urgency, energy, and opportunity comes inevitable risk. The specifics of how recycling is defined, regulated, and invested in greatly impacts its resulting benefit (or harm). In this context, the launch of the Alliance of Mission-Based Recyclers (AMBR) was a critical development in the evolution of recycling as a truly sustainable solution.

As new policies, community Zero Waste plans, industry stakeholder groups, and new recycling infrastructure investments emerge, the *how* and *why* we recycle becomes critical. Some initiatives may expand recycling to keep materials out of landfills and incinerators or to help us “feel better” about how much plastic packaging we consume. However, we will get vastly different results if we design authentic recycling solutions as part of a broader strategy to reduce and reuse, moving toward a regenerative and just future. This is where the perspective of mission-based recyclers is so essential: AMBR knows the limitations and realities of where the industry sits now and holds the highest of standards and vision for where recycling can best contribute and what it can honestly provide.

While we wish there were many more mission-based nonprofit, community-rooted recyclers working toward a Zero Waste vision, that’s not necessarily what we need. Instead, AMBR aims to bring back, elevate, and codify the original recycling principles. We seek to do this through as many intervention points as possible—from proposal requests for municipal contracts to the definition of “recyclability.” All recycling should be driving toward community resilience, environmental benefit, and human health regardless of who is doing it!

Though 2021 was a landmark year for advancing these goals, there is still much to do. We are grateful for amazing allies and collaborators in the recycling industry, across the supply chain, in the nonprofit world, and with policymakers. In 2022, we expect many more exciting opportunities to champion and defend authentic recycling. Please connect with us if this work is important to you.

For the future of authentic recycling,
Lynn Hoffman, National Coordinator for AMBR, and Co-President of Eureka Recycling

BUILDING MOMENTUM

Highlights from 2021

For decades, people have viewed recycling as a waste management strategy. We hope to set the record straight. The goal of authentic recycling is to build a circular supply chain to sustainably meet people's needs and keep carbon and other natural resources in the ground.

In 2021, we made incredible strides toward changing this outdated paradigm. We engaged stakeholders to share our unique view from the pile. We advanced systems change through policy development and modeling best practices. We also worked to reduce problematic plastics through policy change and advocacy.

Stakeholder Engagement

Three AMBR member organizations joined the US Plastics Pact as activators on various workstreams. We successfully advocated for toxicity to indicate whether a material or packaging type should be included on the "Problematic & Unnecessary Materials List" developed by the Pact.

AMBR member organizations are coming to the table to bring mission-based recycling principles to stakeholder processes. Through AMBR's position on the Recycling Partnership's Circularity Council, we were influential in drafting the Pathway to Circularity. This first-of-its-kind initiative outlines transparent action-oriented solutions for packaging circularity challenges in the United States. AMBR's technical expertise helped define high-bar standards to ensure materials labeled as recyclable are being captured at the recycling facility and sent to responsible markets to be made into new products and not fuels.



Lending Expertise: Sharing our “View from the Pile”

AMBR hosted virtual recycling tours for 300 US Plastics Pact participants, caucuses of various state legislatures, groups of environmental advocacy organizations, and individual companies.

The tour establishes a baseline understanding that the goal of any Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) is not to manage waste but to produce feedstock for manufacturing new products and highlights how materials move through a MRF. In addition, we conducted in-depth discussions on why design changes are needed at a packaging-category level instead of initiatives by individual brands, and why recycling is not the appropriate solution for most plastic packaging.

Look for a version of this virtual tour on our website in 2022.

AMBR has also established itself as a well-respected and sought-after technical expert and authority on recycling. We were featured as content experts on major media outlets, including CNN, the Last Week Tonight with John Oliver show, and Minnesota Public Radio.

Advancing Systems Change

Leading Producer Responsibility Policy in Colorado.

AMBR is advancing Producer Responsibility legislation in Colorado as a transformative solution to improve recycling and reduce plastic pollution. Producer Responsibility requires consumer goods companies to fund recycling programs to ensure convenient, easy access to recycling for all.

Eco-Cycle, a founding AMBR member based in Boulder, Colorado, led the stakeholder process within Colorado’s statewide recycling organization and recruited bipartisan legislative sponsors for the bill to be introduced in 2022. Eco-Cycle also developed a coalition of environmental partners to support the legislation and cultivated strategic partnerships with consumer brands to build support with the business community.



Modeling State-of-the-Art Materials Recovery Facility.

The grand opening of Recycle Ann Arbor's new materials recovery facility is set for spring 2022. The new \$6 million facility will process the City of Ann Arbor's recyclables (among others) and can process 30,000 tons per year on a single-shift schedule.

Cultivating Bottle Bill Support. AMBR is building coalitions and support within the recycling industry and with other partners for bottle deposit policies. AMBR is changing the narrative that recyclers do not like bottle bills and taking the lead in crafting policy solutions to help recyclers transition to a new system. We also are aligning with key partners to define the essential principles of a successful bottle bill policy.



Debunking False Solutions

Reducing Problematic Plastics. Working alongside Berkeley City Councilmember Sophie Hahn, AMBR developed a draft-model municipal "truth in recycling" policy for adoption in Berkeley, California. If passed, the legislation will increase transparency in plastics recycling and remove #3, #6, and #7 plastics from the list of "recyclable plastics." These plastics are more toxic to produce and nearly impossible to recycle as there is nearly no market demand. AMBR does not support their collection in curbside recycling programs because these plastics are rarely recycled and should instead be redesigned or eliminated.

AMBR will continue to champion the adoption of this policy in Berkeley, promote the policy model, and share lessons learned to aid other communities in creating transparency in their recycling programs.

Clarifying "Chemical Recycling." AMBR publicly released a position paper on "chemical recycling," drawing a clear line between plastics-to-fuel technologies and authentic recycling.

Chemical recycling includes both plastics-to-plastics technologies and plastics-to-fuel technologies. While plastics-to-plastics technologies may augment traditional recycling programs, plastics-to-fuel technologies have no role in a circular economy and only perpetuate our reliance on fossil fuels and the resulting climate impacts.

2021 CELEBRATIONS

In 2021, we saw unprecedented momentum on state, national, and global levels to reduce plastic pollution and improve US recycling systems. AMBR's work will include elevating and building upon these successes.



Producer Responsibility Laws

Maine and Oregon passed Producer Responsibility laws for packaging bills, and were the first two states in the nation to do so. More than a dozen states proposed similar legislation.



Packaging Reform in California

California prohibited packaging from including the recycling symbol or other recyclability claims unless approved by a specific agency process.



Plastic Pollution Prevention Act in Colorado

Colorado passed the Plastic Pollution Prevention Act, which phases out single-use plastic bags, as well as polystyrene cups and containers. It also reverses a law prohibiting municipalities from passing ordinances to address plastic waste.



Federal Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act

The federal Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act was introduced—a robust and comprehensive bill addressing many intervention points of plastic pollutants.



National Recycling Strategy

The US EPA released a National Recycling Strategy to increase the US recycling rate by 50 percent.

OUR TEAM



Lynn Hoffman, AMBR's National Coordinator & Co-President of Eureka Recycling, is a national expert in Zero Waste recycling systems and policies, particularly as they relate to climate and plastic pollution. She has held various roles at Eureka Recycling in Minneapolis, Minnesota, since 2003, including leading the nonprofit organization as co-president since 2016.



Kate Davenport, Co-President of Eureka Recycling, brings mission-based recycling operational expertise to the AMBR steering committee, including how to merge mission and values with business development, marketing materials, and operational systems.



Kate Bailey, AMBR's Policy Director & Policy Research Director of Eco-Cycle, is a national expert in recycling infrastructure, policies, and programs. As policy research director for Eco-Cycle, she works directly with local governments, state legislators, citizen groups, business leaders, and brands to advance Zero Waste solutions.



Martin Bourque, Executive Director of the Ecology Center (Berkeley), is a renowned environmental expert who has led the Berkeley Ecology Center since 2000. By linking local grassroots grit with highly competent program implementation, Martin is helping AMBR become a high-impact engine of change.



Thea Hassan, AMBR's Communications Manager, has more than ten years of experience in cause communications, non-profit marketing, and environmental writing. Her expertise includes campaign management and outreach planning for community-based projects.



Denaya Shorter, Community Engagement Program Director of the Ecology Center (Berkeley), leads community engagement, education, and outreach for Zero Waste, recycling, and climate action initiatives. Denaya is a proven leader in building and managing community-based programs in support of environmental and social justice, education, and community building.



Bryan Ukena, CEO of Recycle Ann Arbor, brings 30 years of experience spanning a cross-section of public and private solid waste fields, including collections, transfer, processing, financing, and policy expertise.



Marti Matsch, Deputy Director of Eco-Cycle, has 30 years of experience in the Zero Waste movement, from crafting public policy to creating words, images, and communications tools to change a community's environmental behavior.



Mike Garfield, Executive Director of Ecology Center (Michigan), has worked for health, environment, and justice in Michigan for over 30 years. He brings expertise in environmental health and toxins found in consumer and industrial products, including plastic packaging, to the AMBR team.

“*[The recycling symbol] is a marketing campaign made to make plastic look like more of an environmental product than it actually is. The real truth is: Arrows don't mean anything about the recyclability of a product.*”

Lynn Hoffman, National Coordinator for AMBR on CNN

2021 BY THE NUMBERS

22 Conferences, presentations, and workshops led by AMBR recycling experts

200,000+ Combined tons collected and recycled by AMBR cofounders



She inquired as to CNN where her recycling goes. See what we discovered.



Why nonprofit recycling operators decided to unite

AMBR in the News:

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Radio & Podcasts

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Videos

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News & Magazines





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