

Annual Report

2023



ambr
Alliance of Mission-Based Recyclers

ABOUT US

We are an alliance founded by 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



Our vision is simple: Transform the current “take-make-waste” system of consumption into a circular model. We know mission-driven, authentic recycling is a key part of this change, and we’re in the game to champion the pillars on which recycling was originally modeled.

AMBR made significant progress toward building a circular Zero Waste economy in 2022. Building on the work the Break Free from Plastics movement has done to heighten public understanding of the plastic pollution problem, we began to identify, refine, and implement solutions.

We helped two more states, California and Colorado, pass Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies for packaging and paper in 2022. Well-designed EPR policies will provide a significant boost to recycling. But with an increased engagement in passing these bills, getting the nitty-gritty right is more critical than ever, particularly when defining authentic recycling solutions, prioritizing the total reduction in packaging, and designing guidelines to account for community needs. As haulers

and MRF operators, we recognize concerns about the risks of poorly-designed EPR policies negatively impacting recycling — any policy implementation will require an adjustment for recyclers, which is why AMBR members helped shape EPR in packaging for their respective states.

With exponential growth in plastic production in the past decades and as the Zero Waste movement expands to include thousands of diverse stakeholders, organizations, and sectors, one question that has emerged recently is: what is the role of recycling within a Zero Waste society? AMBR took a leading role in helping identify and strategically embrace the movement’s principled disagreements around this question. Alongside the movement, we will continue to help navigate partners and stakeholders toward a better understanding of when recycling done correctly is in service to reducing the overall impact of plastics, and when false solutions should be opposed and thwarted.

This year, we also began to explore toxicity in recycling. We know toxic chemicals are present in our material goods, but the extent to which these chemicals are carried into recycled content is unclear. We need further exploration with environmental health and toxics experts to understand better how the many chemicals in plastics and other commodities do or do not migrate through materials and under what conditions. We plan to partner with key stakeholders in 2023 to explore this much-needed research.

We look forward to continuing this incredible work in 2023 with our partners and allies around the globe. We are grateful for the opportunity to wrestle with the emergent challenges and explore new opportunities in building a Zero Waste world, and we appreciate all who support this work. Please contact us if you’d like to get involved.

With gratitude and hope,
Lynn Hoffman, National Coordinator for AMBR, and Co-President of Eureka Recycling

BUILDING MOMENTUM

Highlights from 2022

The planet we inhabit is endowed with finite natural resources, which are now being overwhelmed by the ever-increasing demands of consumers. The impact of this overuse is being felt by both our environment and our fellow human beings. Recycling can play a critical role in addressing this challenge. As Zero Waste recyclers with a mission-driven approach, AMBR is committed to dispelling any misconceptions around recycling and promoting sustainable solutions. With that objective as our north star, here are some of our accomplishments this year.

Stakeholder Engagement

Hosted the Role of Recycling Convening.

In October of 2022, AMBR, the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), Safer States, and Break Free From Plastic US convened the U.S. Role of Recycling Convening to discuss the role of Material Recovery Facility- (MRF-) based residential recycling in addressing the single-use plastic packaging crisis. At the convening, hosted in Minneapolis, MN, by Eureka Recycling, participants identified important questions needing resolution, shared information and strategic thinking about recycling and plastic packaging, and identified areas of alignment and principled disagreements within the discussion.

The convening kicked off a nationwide discussion of where recycling fits within the Zero Waste hierarchy and will be explored further in 2023.



Advancing Systems Change

Colorado Passed Groundbreaking EPR for Packaging.

In June 2022, Governor Jared Polis approved a statewide EPR for packaging and paper policy, making Colorado the third state to pass this visionary environmental legislation.

Eco-Cycle, one of the co-founding organizations of AMBR, championed the bill as an imperative policy to improve Colorado's dismal 15% recycling rate. The law will provide equitable recycling access across the state, a robust local supply of recyclable materials for businesses, an improved recycling system that gives producers a leadership role, all at no additional cost to consumers, and saving local governments tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. Eco-Cycle continues to guide the implementation of the policy.

Supported the Development of the US Plastics Pact Problematic and Unnecessary Plastics List.

With guidance from AMBR, the US Plastics Pact released its Problematic and Unnecessary Materials List, marking a significant first step toward reducing the use of non-recyclable plastic packaging. The list identifies 11 items that are not currently reusable, recyclable, or compostable at scale in the US and are not projected to be kept in a closed loop in practice by 2025.

The list was developed by US Pact members along the supply chain – more than 100 businesses, non-profit groups, and government organizations, including AMBR co-founders Eureka Recycling, Eco-Cycle, and the Ecology Center (Berkeley). Our national coordinator, Lynn Hoffman, served as a key innovator in the Pact's working group that developed this list and its criteria.



Sharing our “View from the Pile”

Supported People Over Plastic Podcast. AMBR supported the People Over Plastic podcast by providing key input from our unique “view from the pile” in all five episodes of their season 2 podcast. People Over Plastic is a media platform that elevates the most powerful voices fighting for an anti-racist and climate-resilient future. Their season 2 podcast included topics like the international waste trade and keeping recycling local, waste dumping in the US, the impact of fast fashion and how American clothes end up in Chile, and bottle bills and stories of canners in NYC.

Released Chasing Arrows, A Short Film Challenging the Myths About Recycling. AMBR partnered with Emmy Award-winning Peak Plastic Foundation to release “Chasing Arrows: The Truth About Recycling,” a short film setting the record straight on how petrochemical and packaging industries are overwhelming and overtaxing the recycling system. The video has received more than 9,000 views since its release in August 2022 and has been strategically shared with lawmakers, recycling education classes, and municipalities.

Published a Virtual Recycling Tour. Understanding how materials are sorted and processed in a MRF is key to gaining insight into potential pitfalls and barriers to effective recycling. Before the pandemic, AMBR’s co-founders frequently opened our MRF doors to students, lawmakers, and advocates interested in seeing how MRFs operate. It’s been difficult to get tours back up and running, so we developed a virtual MRF tour to continue to share our insights and knowledge.

Put on your hard hats, let’s go check out a MRF!

[Tour the Virtual MRF](#)



2022 BY THE NUMBERS

9

Conferences, presentations, workshops, and a congressional testimony led by AMBR experts

9K+

Views on AMBR's "Chasing Arrows" video, produced by Emmy-award-winning Peak Plastic Foundation

200k

Combined tons collected and recycled by AMBR cofounders



Failure, triumph and opportunity for Colorado's waste system



Industry group blasts one segment of chemical recycling



AMBR in the News:

5

Radio & Podcasts

2

Videos

5

News & Magazines



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.



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.



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.



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.



Lucy Mullany, Director of Policy and Advocacy for Eureka Recycling, works with local governments, state legislators, community advocates, and others to advance Zero Waste and recycling policy in Minnesota. Her policy background includes financial empowerment, consumer protections, and universal basic income.



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



Alex Danovitch, Director of Strategy and Business Development for Recycle Ann Arbor, brings a unique perspective to his work, derived from over 25 years of experience in Zero Waste and recycling social enterprise development, planning, implementation, and policy. He is currently leading the development of a 21-acre eco-park as a model of local circularity.



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.



Suzanne "Zan" Jones, Executive Director of Eco-Cycle, has over 30 years of experience and expertise in environmental and climate policy in the non-profit and government sectors. Suzanne is in her ninth year as the executive director of the Boulder County non-profit Eco-Cycle, one of the nation's oldest and largest non-profit recyclers.



Thea Hassan, AMBR's Communications Manager, has more than 10 years of experience in cause communications, non-profit marketing, and environmental writing. Her experience includes campaign management and outreach planning for community-based projects.



Marti Matsch, Deputy Director of Eco-Cycle, has more than 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.



ambr

Alliance of Mission-Based Recyclers

Visit us at ambr-recyclers.org.