

THE US NEEDS EPR POLICIES FOR PACKAGING AND PAPER

AMBR supports strong Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies as a key strategy to reduce unnecessary packaging, scale up reuse systems, improve and increase recycling, ensure equitable and convenient access to recycling, and help drive more sustainable product design.

EPR policies require product manufacturers to pay for the costs to take back, recycle, or properly dispose of their products and packaging. Governments and taxpayers currently cover all of these direct costs, while communities and the environment absorb the externalized health and climate costs of toxic and wasteful packaging and products. While EPR policies vary by region, the common goals are to provide a strong incentive to companies to redesign and reduce packaging and generate a dedicated stable financial source to improve collection, sorting, and recycling, composting, and reuse infrastructure. Designing these policies thoughtfully can ensure they deliver on those goals.



Benefits of EPR for Packaging and Paper to the Recycling System

Recycling in the US has stagnated for over a decade and is plagued by volatile commodity markets, increasing contamination rates, limited local government resources, inequities in services, and a patchwork system of programs. Voluntary programs, more education, and program improvements funded solely by local governments are not enough. We need big changes to address the crisis we're facing, and well-crafted EPR can help transform the packaging stream and how we fund and manage the entire system.

EPR policies for containers, packaging, and printed paper have finally been introduced in the US after decades of proven success in increasing recycling rates and recycling quality in Europe and Canada. More than 40 countries and provinces have mandatory producer responsibility policies for containers and packaging, and four US states — California, Colorado, Maine, and Oregon — adopted policies recently.



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Alliance of Mission-Based Recyclers

EPR for Packaging Could Be a Foundational Policy for Addressing the Waste Crisis in the US

A strong EPR for packaging and paper policy provides the following benefits:



Reduces unnecessary packaging and plastic pollution. Through eco-modulation, companies can be charged based on the amount and type of packaging used. The less packaging a company uses, the less they will pay. There can also be incentives to move companies toward using more reusable, recyclable, compostable and less toxic packaging.



Increases recycling rates. A strong EPR policy will set strong, enforceable, targets for reduction, reuse, recycling and composting, driving investments in the needed infrastructure to successfully and responsibly capture and recycle more materials back into the supply chain. By recycling more, we can create a reliable domestic supply of recycled metal, paper, plastic, and glass to make new products.



Reduces climate pollution. Every one ton of materials recycled saves nearly three tons of carbon emissions. By raising the recycling rate from 32% to nearly 70%, the US could save over 700 million metric tons of CO₂, the equivalent of taking 129 million cars off the road each year.



Saves money for local governments. Producer responsibility for containers and packaging can reduce or eliminate the money local governments currently spend to operate curbside recycling programs or recycling drop-off centers, potentially saving tens to hundreds of thousands of tax payer dollars per year.



Improves equity in recycling. Recycling across the US is generally more convenient in more affluent communities and among single-family homes. Apartment residents often lack onsite recycling services, creating a service inequity between single-family homes and multifamily residences. Only 4% of multifamily properties have recycling on site compared to 52% of single-family homes with curbside recycling. In addition, many communities cannot afford to provide recycling drop-off centers and rural areas face significantly higher costs. EPR can create a sustainable funding system to support convenient, equitable recycling for all residents regardless of income, housing type, or demographics. A common goal of EPR is for all residents to have recycling that is as convenient as their trash service – currently 40% of Americans (40 million households) do not have convenient recycling services.

Focus on Recycling Right, Not Just Recycling More.

An effective EPR for packaging policy must focus on recycling right, not just recycling more. A strong EPR policy is an opportunity to raise the bar for all operations and programs across the country, while poor policy is a risk to simply shift the costs of recycling without ushering in systemic improvements and community benefits. As with any big policy change, the details of how it is designed and implemented matter.

As recycling haulers and MRF operators, AMBR members recognize there are

operational and financial uncertainties raised by a transition to an EPR-funded system. Many recycling operators have opposed or been reluctant to support EPR policies because of these operational unknowns. AMBR believes an EPR system for packaging could be in the best interest of strengthening U.S. recycling and can be done in a way that builds upon the existing network of public and private investments, community programs, and service providers.



AMBR's Key Priorities for EPR Policies

A strong EPR for packaging and paper policy should include the following:

- ✓ **Strong definition of authentic recycling** that excludes the use of recycled materials to produce energy, fuels, fuel products, or landfill cover;
- ✓ **Eco-modulation** designed to incentivize source reduction, reuse, recycling and composting (in that order) while creating disincentives or bans on toxic packaging.
- ✓ **Clear and enforceable targets** that include source reduction, reuse, and recycling rates;
- ✓ **Producers/Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs)** should be held accountable to meet established targets and be responsive to community needs through strong public oversight mechanisms and clear accountability measures;
- ✓ **Create equitable and convenient access** to recycling services for all residents;
- ✓ **Cover all materials** within the packaging and paper industry;
- ✓ **Correct for disproportionate impacts** of packaging production, waste, and pollution on low income, overburdened, or historically marginalized communities;
- ✓ **Extensive and well-defined stakeholder involvement** in the plan development, implementation, and ongoing revisions to ensure local input and to refine the system over time;
- ✓ **Producers should pay for ALL of the costs of the system**;
- ✓ Maximize the **use of existing recycling infrastructure**;
- ✓ Provide **local governments with the choice** about provision of services;
- ✓ Drive stronger markets for recyclable materials through **minimum recycled content requirements** and regional, responsible end markets;
- ✓ **Regionally-relevant educational materials** that reflect local community demographics and values; and
- ✓ **Opening bidding processes for service providers**, with contract and reimbursement structures that drive higher labor standards, cleaner bales, community benefits, and other criteria beyond the lowest cost.

Learn more about AMBR's strategies to reduce plastic production and improve plastics recycling. Visit ambr-recyclers.org.

