



March 8, 2021

Ms. Nena Shaw
Acting Director, Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
EPA Docket Center
OLEM Docket
Mail Code 28221T
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Comments on National Recycling Goal: Recycling Rate Measurement Comment Period, (EPA-HQ-OLEM-2020-0443)

Dear Ms. Shaw:

The Can Manufacturers Institute (CMI) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the United States (U.S.) Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA or "Agency") approach to measurement of its ambitious national recycling goal of a 50 percent recycling rate by 2030.

Background

CMI is the national trade association of the metal can manufacturing industry and its suppliers in the United States. The can manufacturing industry accounts for the annual domestic production of approximately 130.7 billion food, beverage and general line cans. The industry employs more than 28,000 people with plants in 33 states, Puerto Rico and American Samoa; and generates about \$15.7 billion in direct economic activity. CMI members are committed to providing safe, nutritious and refreshing canned food, beverages and other products to consumers.

Can manufacturers make essential steel food, aluminum beverages and other types of metal cans for consumer use, and all these cans are made with metal that recycles forever. In addition to the metal being able to be recycled forever, many of these metal containers are manufactured with high amounts of recycled content. For example, the average U.S. aluminum beverage can is manufactured with 73 percent recycled content, and the average U.S. steel food can has up to 35 percent recycled content.

Metal cans are recycled at scale with existing infrastructure in the United States. This is why aluminum beverage and steel food cans are the most recycled beverage and food packaging in the United States with a 46 percent and 71 percent recycling rate, respectively. Nearly 5 million

aluminum beverage cans are recycled in the United States **every hour**, which is the equivalent of 11 12-packs per person being recycled each year.

Metal cans are the best example of the recycling system working in the United States. They are easy to separate via magnets or eddy currents. They have sufficient end markets to buy baled metal cans, and particularly with used beverage cans, they provide critical revenue to the material recovery facilities that sell the baled cans to end-markets. Also, aluminum and steel recyclers turn metal cans into useful, recyclable products, typically a new can. The vast majority of used beverage cans are turned into new beverage cans and often go from the recycling bin back to store shelf as a new can within 60 days. The infrastructure and technology exist today to recycle more cans. Collecting and recycling more metal cans means more recycling that will deliver significant economic and environmental impact.

Comments

CMI details below its recommendations on questions surrounding measurement of EPA's laudable national recycling goal.

CMI Suggests the Adoption of Two Recycling Rates

CMI suggests that EPA adopts two recycling rates: one recycling rate that focuses on household core recyclables and a second rate that is more comprehensive in the material types and sources included. CMI's feedback on each of EPA's questions reflect this suggestion of two rates.

Household Recycling Rate

CMI believes it is important to have a "Household Recycling Rate." This more focused rate measures the core recyclables (paper and paperboard, glass, metal and certain kinds of plastic) from the residential home that are mechanically recycled. This rate will reflect how well Americans are recycling in their day-to-day lives. This more focused rate should be what the 50 percent by 2030 goal is tied to since then Americans will feel more connected to meeting EPA's recycling rate goal as it relates more closely to how they recycle and this is what most people think of when they think of recycling.

Inclusive Rate

EPA should track an additional recycling rate that is more inclusive (i.e., "Inclusive Rate"). It includes what is tracked in the Household Recycling Rate, as well as more sources of material, more material types and more forms of recycling. The Inclusive Rate will reflect how well America is recycling the materials it uses in general.

Section 1, Source of Recyclable Material

We believe a Household Recycling Rate focused on the recycling of core recyclables in the residential household provides a metric of how well consumers are recycling generally accepted recyclables in the household. A household-specific rate is relatable to the average American as recycling core recyclables at home is what people typically think of when they contemplate recycling. Further, if too many sources are included in a single rate, it could make it impossible

to decipher if Americans are truly getting better at recycling in their day-to-day lives. Importantly, the more focused rate proposed herein is what should comprise the 50 percent by 2030 goal. In summary, this more focused rate will only look at material that comes from residential homes.

A second, more inclusive rate will enable the tracking of more material types and more sources. This Inclusive Rate is also important because the U.S. needs to, in general, move towards a more circular economy, not just with core recyclables within the household, but with all material types and recycling streams. This second rate will be one measure of how circular the U.S. is becoming in its material use generally. Of course, it will be only one measure of circularity since the circular economy construct encompasses so much more than recycling. This more inclusive rate will look at material from all the sources listed by EPA for public comment.

Additional sources of material that EPA may want to consider are public spaces, marinas, event venues and airlines. All of these are areas where cans, mainly beverage cans, are unfortunately lost from the recycling system. The easy portability of aluminum beverage cans is one reason why consumers enjoy a refreshing beverage in a can outside of the home. It is important that all away-from-home sources of material are included in the more inclusive recycling rate.

Section 2, Material Streams

CMI suggests including certain material streams in the previously discussed Household Recycling Rate and Inclusive Rate.

The Household Recycling Rate should only include core recyclables (i.e., recyclables that have historically been accepted by local recycling programs and are generally accepted today). These core recyclables typically include paper and paperboard, glass, metals and plastic packaging. EPA may want to consider including only certain kinds of plastic packaging; some plastic types are rarely recycled due to economic and/or technological reasons (e.g., resin codes #3, #4, #6 and #7).

The Inclusive Rate should include all the material streams listed for comment. Some may say food and organics should be included in the more focused rate that CMI suggests tying to the 50 percent by 2030 goal because food waste is currently included in the overall recycling rate that EPA calculates and on the assumption that there will be more composting options offered at the home in the coming years. However, composting service at the home is currently much more the exception than the rule. Also, if food and organics are included, it could make it difficult to meet the national recycling rate goal, because food and organics are so heavy and can tip the scales greatly on the recycling rate percentage.

Section 3, Material Management Pathways

The suggested Household Recycling Rate and Inclusive Rate will incorporate different material management pathways.

The Household Recycling Rate should only include mechanical recycling. Today, mechanical recycling is how most all commonly accepted recyclables that consumers recycle in their day-to-day lives are recycled. Thus, mechanical recycling should be the only material management pathway accounted for in the recycling rate tied to the national goal that EPA is seeking to rally Americans around.

The Inclusive Rate should consider material management pathways beyond mechanical recycling. Reuse, repair, refurbishment and donation should not be considered. In plain language, these material management streams are different from recycling, which is why there is the well-known waste hierarchy of “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.” The other material management pathways listed in EPA’s proposal should be included if and only if they meet EPA’s working definition of “recycling.” CMI understands that EPA does not have an Agency-wide definition of “recycling” utilized across its programs. CMI sees value in the definition for recycling developed by EPA’s Measurement Working Group, which follows:

“Recycling refers to the series of activities by which discarded or used materials are collected, sorted, processed and/or converted into feedstock and are used in the manufacture of new products. *Excludes* the use of these materials for energy production or as fuel substitutes as well as for composting.”

Looking at this definition of “recycling” and considering what material management pathways to include in CMI’s suggested more inclusive recycling rate, CMI believes that EPA should consider how to exclude, or at least have some measure of, downcycling. For example, materials that become landfill cover and are unlikely to ever be recovered and recycled should not be included in the Inclusive Rate. Similarly, waste-to-energy should not be considered recycling because once the material is turned into energy, it can no longer be recovered and recycled again. Also, when the chemical recycling methods listed in the EPA proposal are used to turn plastic into fuel, a consumptive use of that material, that should also not be considered recycling.

To bring focus to the EPA’s recycling initiatives, CMI encourages EPA to take stock of recycling definitions utilized across its program offices and consider developing an Agency-wide definition of recycling through an open and transparent notice-and-comment process. CMI believes a clear definition of “recycling” will help guide EPA’s methodology on what to include in any recycling rate.

Section 4, Material Destinations

Many materials that are exported from the United States are recycled. For example, it is fair to assume exported used metal containers are recycled since they are such a valuable commodity and are easily recycled, often into new cans. This is why in the calculation of the aluminum beverage can recycling rate, CMI and its partner in calculating the rate, the Aluminum Association, include exports of used beverage cans as recycled. However, other material types are exported as waste and go straight to landfill.

EPA should include exports in its calculation of the recycling rate if it has reasonable confidence the material stream exported is indeed recycled by the receiving economy. CMI recognizes this adds complexity to the recycling rate calculation since the material types exported need to be tracked along with the economy's treatment of the imported material. CMI believes this clarification is important as certain material types exported are often times not recycled by the receiving economy.

If EPA decides to include all exports, CMI encourages EPA to be transparent and as granular as it can about how much of each specific material stream is exported, where the material stream is exported and the final product created.

Section 5, Other Considerations

Whichever way EPA decides to measure the recycling rate or rates, CMI encourages EPA to take an approach where it feels that it has reliable data to accurately calculate the rate or rates. The collection of data and solid modeling is important so that Americans have confidence in the information EPA is disseminating and tracking. Development of a robust methodology, with stakeholder input, will obviate the need to revise the approach later, which has the potential to erode public confidence in EPA's recycling program generally.

EPA should also ensure that its recycling rate methodology is consistent with and does not expressly deviate from its waste regulatory framework, mainly pursuant to the U.S. Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), and other relevant media programs related to recycling.

CMI appreciates the opportunity to comment as EPA determines how to measure its important national recycling rate goal.

Please let CMI know if you would like more information.

Best regards,



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