

Industry-Led Coalition Calls for Recycled Content Minimum in Plastic Bags

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OTTAWA, June 26, 2019 /PRNewswire/ - Twenty-seven organizations call for urgent government action to help deal with the global plastic problem. The industry-led Recycle More Bags coalition proposes using legislative action and procurement policy to drive demand for a minimum of 20% post-consumer recycled content in some types of plastic bags by 2025.



Bales of recyclable film plastic being stored at a material recovery facility. (CNW Group/Recycle More Bags)

The United States and Canada have been largely dependent on foreign markets for recycling plastic bags and similar plastic grades, like plastic wrap. Foreign demand for these products has decreased markedly in recent years, primarily as a result of China's "National Sword Policy," which banned the import of many recyclables. The North American recycling industry is now more dependent than ever on the health of domestic plastic film recycling end-markets. However, these domestic markets have long been impeded by the continued expansion of domestic oil and gas activity and the low-cost virgin plastic resins that are produced as co-products.

According to More Recycling, a company that tracks plastic recycling year over year in the United States and Canada, the amount of bags and wrap collected through at-store recycling programs has grown, but that growth is expected to slow or reverse if the dynamics in the marketplace continue. There is a need to recognize the value of using recycled resin in new products to mitigate plastic pollution and to encourage the expansion of the North American circular economy.

The Recycle More Bags coalition consists of stakeholders involved in the plastic recycling industry: industry associations, material recovery facility (MRF) operators, plastic reclaimers, municipalities, environmental non-profits, recycling consultants, and a film plastic stewardship organization. The coalition's signatories, who are situated at various steps along the circular economy supply chain, see a need for government to mandate an increased use of recycled resin in plastic bags. At this pivotal moment, government intervention is essential to encourage continued uptake of recycled resins by the plastic film industry, which has been slowed by low pricing of virgin plastics.

The call-to-action proposes a progressive timeline to increase the use of post-consumer recycled content in garbage bags and grocery bags. The vast majority of these two types of plastic bags are made from 100% virgin plastic resin. Incentivizing – and where needed, requiring – a minimum level of recycled content in these two applications will replace large amounts of virgin material and support the dual goals of increasing plastic recycling rates while ensuring plastic bags are managed in an environmentally responsible manner.

Increased demand for recycled plastic resin would in turn create greater incentive for effective and efficient recycling of plastic products, expediting the shift to a circular economy and improved environmental outcomes. For example, if all plastic bags sold in the United States and Canada included 20% recycled content, carbon emissions savings of about 320,000 metric tonnes per year – the equivalent of the removal of 250,000 cars from the road – would result.

Quotes from signatories

Andy Mitchell, Mayor

Selwyn Township: Municipality

"The Township of Selwyn is pleased to be a part of this important environmental initiative which supports our efforts to address climate change. It is important that we act collaboratively to reduce our carbon footprint and inspire more sustainable waste management practices."

Barry Friesen, General Manager

Cleanfarms Inc.: Non-profit industry stewardship organization

"Mandating post-consumer recycled content in the manufacturing of film plastic products such as grocery and garbage bags can have a far-reaching effect on driving the development of domestic end-market recycling businesses. A procurement policy that mandates content will fuel the circular economy and create Canadian jobs. In the agricultural sector, Cleanfarms is looking at how we can standardize the practice of including post-consumer content in our packaging."

Lynn Rubinstein, Executive Director

Northeast Recycling Council: Non-profit regional industry association

"The Northeast Recycling Council is honored to support this important initiative. We are particularly excited that it is industry led. Demand for recycled content is at the heart of successful recycling, as well as the thousands of jobs that are dependent upon it."

Mark Bell, Director of Southgate Anaerobic Digestion Facility

Petawawa Biofuel LP: Processor of organic material

"We want to have a market for the plastics we are left with that are unavoidably mixed up in peoples' green bins. This is a great idea to promote the circular economy in North America."

Martin Baumann, VP Sales

EREMA: Maker of plastic recycling systems

"Many MRFs see plastic films and bags as a lost material that can't be recycled. That is far from the reality - post-consumer films and bags can successfully be turned into quality pellets that, in turn, can be mixed with virgin pellets to make new film and bags."

Martin Vogt, CEO & President

EFS-plastics Inc.: Plastic recycler

"If we are serious about the circular economy, we need to use recycled content in everyday products. Using recycled content in items like garbage bags and grocery bags allows companies like EFS-plastics to invest in additional capacity, so we can recycle more bags domestically."

Robin Wiener, President

Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc.: Recycling industry association

"By creating incentives for minimum recycled content, we can both increase plastic recycling rates and help ensure plastic bags are managed in an environmentally responsible manner."

Tom Outerbridge, General Manager

Sims Municipal Recycling: MRF operator

"Plastic bags are one plastic item that we consistently receive through curbside recycling programs, and that we consistently send to landfill. We need content laws to drive demand."

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