

Task Force to Study Methods  
for Reducing Consumer Packaging  
that Generates Solid Waste

Next Meeting: July 19, 2017  
Time: 10 am to 12:30 pm  
Location: DEEP Headquarters, Gina McCarthy Auditorium, 79 Elm Street,  
Hartford, CT 06106

**July 19, 2017**  
**Task Force Meeting**

The Task Force Task Force to Study Methods for Reducing Consumer Packaging that Generates Solid Waste (the Task Force) will meet on July 19, 2017 from 10 am to 12:30 pm at the DEEP office building at 79 Elm Street in Hartford, Connecticut.

At the July 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Task Force will hear from organizations and interested parties including environmental organizations and producers of packaging materials and others. We will discuss the following items with a heavy emphasis on Item #6:

1. Where are the opportunities for increased reuse of the packaging in Connecticut?

This question is outside the scope of The Recycling Partnership's mission and activities.

2. What steps are being taken to reduce packaging that can be utilized in Connecticut?

Through ASTRX, The Recycling Partnership works actively on design for improved recyclability. See: [http://astrx.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/NavigatingRecyclingSystem\\_FINAL\\_May10.pdf](http://astrx.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/NavigatingRecyclingSystem_FINAL_May10.pdf) for an example of tools to support such work.

3. How is the packaging material recycled?
  - a. How specifically in Connecticut is it being recycled?
  - b. What is the rate of recycling?

The Recycling Partnership assumes that the State maintains the most accurate state-specific recycling rate information. However, the 2016 State of Curbside Report captures some Connecticut-specific information: <http://recyclingpartnership.org/updated-2016-state-of-curbside-report/>

4. How does contamination of the packaging material occur during the recycling process?
  - a. How can contamination be reduced or eliminated?

The Recycling Partnership's work to reduce contamination rates in places such as Chicago, Atlanta, and across Massachusetts put with other internal research confirms for us three key elements for the Task Force's consideration.

First, contamination carries a stiff economic impact, for the community, the Material Recovery Facility (MRF), and in the recycled material's ability to compete with virgin feedstocks. With support from both our MRF Working Group and Technical Council, The Recycling Partnership is currently preparing a white paper on the cost of contamination, to be made public by year-end.

Second, while consumer outreach is an element of reducing high contamination rates, it is false to assume that contamination is solvable by public education alone. Effective contamination reduction protocols involve stronger communication between the community and the MRF, as well as operational components that engage the driver, route walker, or inspection officer. Details on good contamination-reduction programs can be found at <http://tools.recyclingpartnership.org/contamination/>. In Massachusetts, such programs have resulted in a 30% reduction of targeted contaminants in curbside collection programs and 50% reduction in drop off programs.

Finally, while contamination is frequently measured by weight, the most troublesome contaminants are often very light. Film, plastic bags, "tangles" such as hoses or Christmas lights, and hazardous materials are frequently the mostly costly to the MRF in terms of contamination but when effectively reduced from the inbound stream of recyclables only marginally affect a weight-based contamination rate. This weight/impact disconnect will remain a challenge in the relationship between the community and the MRF.

When assessing contamination, Capture Rate Studies are the purest evaluation of understanding how much and what sorts of trash are in the recycling, and how much recycling is in the trash. Initial evaluations from Partnership-sponsored Capture Rate Studies confirm the Partnership's approach does reduce targeted inbound contaminants, but also reveal interesting national trends such as the tendency for consumers to bag recyclables, often rendering the recyclables unrecoverable within the MRF.

##### 5. Explain the existing markets for recycling the packaging material.

There is evidence that demand for recycled feedstocks outstrips supply for many materials thus showing ample room to absorb more recyclables into the economy. The Recycling Partnership recognizes that recycling exists to fuel manufacturing and commodity prices affect the system. Recycled content PET, HDPE, PP, Glass, Aluminum, Steel, Fiber, OCC, Cartons, etc. must compete with virgin-sourced competitors on price, quality, and quantity. Improvements to the recycling system should result in more reliable feedstocks for manufacturing in order to deliver the important economic and environmental impacts that recycling has to offer. The occasional impact of low commodity prices can be effectively addressed within the MRF/community contractual relationship.

6. What are some specific policies and programs that will help consumers reduce the amount of packaging they create?

The Recycling Partnership is a national nonprofit overhauling the US recycling system. While recycling feels universal, only half of Americans can recycle at home as easily as they can dispose of trash. Of those homes that do recycle, less than half the available material is recovered. The Recycling Partnership estimates that nationally there are 22M tons of recyclables currently unrecovered each year. That material has a MRF value of approximately \$1.8B and if recovered could be the GHG equivalent of annually removing 10.5M cars from the road.

Thus, The Recycling Partnership works to improve the US system by focusing on the start of the reverse supply chain, local governments. There we focus on: 1. Increasing recycling access and 2. Optimizing existing recycling programs. In the past 3 years, we've partnered with more than 400 communities, deployed 400,000 new recycling carts, and helped leverage \$27M worth of new infrastructure. Our model is completely scale-able and with each new funding partner, our reach and impact grows.

7. What recommendations should this Task Force make in its final report for reducing consumer packaging that generates solid waste?

Any recommendations should address:

1. Current access across the entire state: Ensuring that recycling opportunities are established completely on par disposal. Identifying service gaps at household, work, and play levels.
2. Optimization of existing programs: Increasing participation and reducing contamination requires evaluations of community-hauler-MRF contracts, local collection operations, consumer outreach, MRF processing protocols, and more.

What would Connecticut expect to find if it ran a thorough assessment of programs in the state? As highlighted in the 2016 State of Curbside Report linked above, many programs across the country are underperforming. While some past efforts to reduce waste and increase recycling have focused on sole initiatives such as policy or public outreach, the true recycling success relies on effort in five integrated areas: end markets, reprocessing/mill production, MRF acceptability and sort-ability, collection and community engagement, and product design and production. The needs of each sector must be met in order to positively affect the whole system.

The Task Force would like to receive information two ways:

1. Orally - provided at the Task Force meeting on July 19, 2017.
2. Written – provided on or before July 19, 2017. Submit information to the clerk of the task force, Robin Bumpen, during Task Force meetings or emailed to [Robin.Bumpen@cga.ct.gov](mailto:Robin.Bumpen@cga.ct.gov).