

# **New York Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Printed Paper**

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Chair Harckham, Chair Glick, and committee members, my name is Kristen Lawton. I am a member of the New York Product Stewardship Council (NYPSC) and the director of recycling and reduction at the Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency (OCRRA) in Central New York. The latter of which has an award-winning recycling program with a 30-year track record. Given both organizations' expertise in solid waste, I offer the following insights and appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today.

## **Problem:**

**NY STATE'S RECYCLING SYSTEM IS IN CRISIS.**

**We generate too much trash and our recycling rates are stagnant.**

It is unrealistic to expect municipalities alone to shoulder the environmental burden of reducing waste, improving recycling rates, and reducing resident confusion, all while recycling program costs continue to climb.

In Onondaga County, where we serve some 210,000 households, we have invested more than \$5.6 million since 2019 to keep our curbside recycling program going, yet our recycling rates are decreasing! It is getting more expensive for haulers to recycle, often it is equal to or more expensive than throwing things out, and so recycling leaks out of our system.

## **Solution:**

To reach NYS Solid Waste Management Plan goals to combat these problems, we need a solution that involves all stakeholders throughout the supply chain, including product manufacturers. By modernizing NY State's recycling system, we can:

- Reduce packaging waste at the source,
- Recycle what cannot be reduced, and
- Invest in infrastructure and education to improve recycling rates.

## **How do we get there?**

Voluntary efforts cannot achieve the necessary change. We need a law for packaging and printed paper that will encourage joint interest in recycling

success. We need a law like the successful EPR laws that we already have for electronics, rechargeable batteries, paint, and other products. We need a law that will:

- 1) **Hold manufacturers responsible for the end-of-life management of the packaging they produce so they produce less waste and more recyclable packaging. Right now, there is no incentive to do this.** In a time of extreme market volatility and increasing expenses, the burden to collect, manage, and market recyclables falls to local governments and taxpayers. A shift in responsibility **MUST** take place; the current funding system is not sufficient to improve stagnant recycling rates, nor is it sustainable.
- 2) **Incentivize manufacturers to minimize their packaging size and increase the recyclability and recycled content of the packaging that they produce,** instead of making packaging out of hard to, or impossible to recycle materials. This will increase recycling volumes and support a circular economy, which is also a goal of the NYS Solid Waste Management Plan.
- 3) **Require manufacturers to contribute to the expansion and modernization of recycling infrastructure.** This would ensure that programs can handle more, as well as complex types of packaging, and that they can expand to underserved communities. The sorting technology is here; investment in infrastructure and job creation is what is needed for advancement.
- 4) **Require manufacturers to fund recycling education,** so universal recycling rules and product labeling can be established. This funding will expand the reach of recycling education to underserved communities, reform the current patchwork of local recycling programs, and correct widespread consumer confusion about what is recyclable, which will increase customer faith and participation in the recycling system.

**This sort of law must:**

- **Engage disconnected manufacturers** in the end-of-life management of their products and packaging.
- **Provide sustainable funding that covers the full cost of recycling** – public education, collection, sorting, and marketing.

- **Cover the cost of ALL recyclables, including paper** – 60-70% of recycling is paper, so most of the cost is in managing paper packaging and products.
- **Include a clear funding mechanism** – it must specify how municipalities get reimbursed for recycling costs and how services will be funded in areas where municipalities do not provide service.
- **Provide incentives for manufacturers that reduce packaging waste.**
- **Set high recycling rate targets** to ensure that the system continues to improve.
- **Foster circularity by encouraging use of more recycled content**, which will boost market demand and help meet Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act goals.
- **Ensure that all New Yorkers have access to good recycling programs!** We still have large sectors (e.g., multi-family housing outside of NYC) that are underserved, and programs that are inconsistent in service and quality.

Recycling markets are highly volatile and place public funds at an unacceptable level of risk. The NYPSC urges the state legislature to modernize the state’s recycling system with an Extended Producer Responsibility approach that improves recycling rates, reduces waste at the start of the supply chain, and protects municipalities from the financial risks of unstable recycling markets.

Municipal recycling systems desperately need to be modernized and improved. Local governments and New York taxpayers cannot wait any longer for this much-needed relief.

The NYPSC applauds your continued efforts to support Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging and paper products. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kristen Lawton  
New York Product Stewardship Council