Fields of Opportunities

STATE OF IOWA

CHESTER J. CULVER, GOVERNOR
PATTY JUDGE, LT. GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
RICHARD A. LEOPOLD, DIRECTOR

July 1, 2009

Lisa Jackson
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Ms. Jackson:

I am writing to request that US EPA take a leadership role in addressing one of the most critical environmental and economic issues facing communities around the country—a sustainable financing system for municipal recycling programs. Municipalities have traditionally had primary responsibility for implementing recycling programs throughout the country. Sustainable financing for their programs is essential to improving recycling and achieving US EPA's goals of conserving materials, reducing waste and combating climate change.

Community recycling programs have made tremendous strides in the last two decades leading to a significant increase in recycling rates – from 16 percent in 1990 to more than 30 percent in the past few years. The dramatic increases experienced in the 1990s have leveled off in this decade, in part due to limited funding for additional outreach, education, enforcement, and capital to foster continual improvement of these recycling programs. We have reached this plateau at precisely the time when the commodity industries – paper, plastic, glass, aluminum, and steel – have all set ambitious goals for the use of recycled materials, reflecting their growing dependence on the expansion of recovery efforts.

In most American communities, recycling programs compete for increasingly scarce local tax revenues with other critical public services, such as police and fire departments, libraries and schools. Many European and Asian countries and the Canadian provinces of Ontario, Quebec and soon Manitoba have implemented innovative policy approaches to finance municipal recycling programs outside of the local tax structure. Such policies have lead to increased recycling rates and improved efficiency in local programs, while also helping to meet the needs of the commodity industries and the increasing commitment of consumer product companies to more environmentally sustainable packaging.

To address this critical issue, I request that you consider convening a multi-stakeholder dialogue to explore sustainable financing strategies for municipal recycling. Such a dialogue must involve representatives of State and local government, not-for-profit advocacy organizations, and the manufacturers of the products and packaging that are

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managed in the municipal recycling stream (e.g., paper products and metal, glass and plastic containers). In doing so, the US EPA would provide a tremendous service to aid States and local governments around the country in moving forward to conserve resources and reduce waste. Such a dialogue would also ensure the achievement of EPA's Resource Conservation Challenge objectives and contribute significantly to its efforts on climate change.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to working with you to develop a sustainable financing system for municipal recycling programs.

Sincerely,

Brian Tormey

Brian Tormey, Chief
Land Quality Bureau

Cc: Mathy Stanislaus, Assistant Administrator, OSWER
Matt Hale, Director, Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery
Betsy Smidinger, Director, ORCR, Resource Conservation and Sustainability Division