

# National Recycling Strategy: Part One of a Series on Building a Circular Economy for All

## Executive Summary



The *2021 National Recycling Strategy* focuses on enhancing and advancing the national municipal solid waste (MSW) recycling system by identifying strategic objectives and suggesting stakeholder-led actions to create a stronger, more resilient, and cost-effective recycling system. It is the first document in a series dedicated to building a circular economy that reduces demand for raw materials, redesigns products to be less resource-intensive, and recaptures “waste” to manufacture new materials and products. While advancing MSW recycling alone will not create a circular economy for the United States, doing so is a key action toward reaching this paradigm.

The *2021 Strategy* reflects the work of many stakeholders—including recycling professional and industry associations, private companies, and non-governmental and community-based organizations—and input from other federal agencies, states, tribal and local governments. The strategy also reflects input from the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) and recognizes the need to implement materials management strategies that are inclusive of communities with environmental justice concerns.

The domestic MSW recycling system currently faces several challenges, including confusion about what materials can be recycled, outdated recycling infrastructure, diminished markets for recycled materials, and inconsistent methodologies for measuring performance. The *2021 National Recycling Strategy* identifies actions to address these challenges and builds on the collaborative stakeholder efforts that began under the 2019 [National Framework for Advancing the U.S. Recycling System](#). To this end, the Strategy is aligned with and supports the National Recycling Goal of a 50 percent recycling rate by 2030.

The 2021 Strategy includes five strategic objectives:

### Objective A: Improve Markets for Recycling Commodities

We need to improve markets for recyclable materials and recyclable products and better integrate recycled materials into product and packaging designs.

- A1.** Promote market development.
- A2.** Produce an analysis of different types of end markets that considers resilience, environmental benefits and other relevant factors for decision makers.
- A3.** Increase manufacturing use of recycled material feedstocks in domestic manufacturing.
- A4.** Increase demand for recycled materials through policies, programs, initiatives and incentives.
- A5.** Continue to support research and development of technologies and products that will expand market opportunities.
- A6.** Explore possible ratification of the Basel Convention and encourage environmentally sound management of scrap and recyclables traded with other countries.

### Objective B: Increase Collection and Improve Materials Management Infrastructure

Investment and innovation are necessary to improve the efficiency of materials processing infrastructure, increase collection of materials and create a more resilient recycling system.

- B1.** Improve understanding of available recycling infrastructure and needs.
- B2.** Increase awareness and availability of public and private funding and incentives and effective strategies to access the funding.



- B3.** Continue to fund research, development, demonstration and deployment of new technologies and processes for recycling.
- B4.** Increase consideration of recoverability and sustainability in the design of products.
- B5.** Optimize processing efficiencies at materials recovery facilities.
- B6.** Increase collection of recyclable materials.



### Objective C: Reduce Contamination in the Recycled Materials Stream

Reducing contamination in the recycled materials stream will improve the quality of the recycled material, enabling more material to be recycled and reducing discarded material.

- C1.** Enhance education and outreach to the public on the value of recycling and how to recycle properly.
- C2.** Ensure resources are available for education and outreach initiatives.

### Objective D: Enhance Policies and Programs to Support Circularity

Different policies and programs can be effective in increasing circularity. Efforts under this area aim to increase coordination, availability, and accessibility of information on recycling programs and policies at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels.

- D1.** Strengthen federal coordination to support and encourage actions to improve the U.S. recycling system.
- D2.** Conduct an analysis of different policies that could address recycling challenges.
- D3.** Conduct a study on reflecting environmental and social costs in product pricing.
- D4.** Increase awareness of and continue voluntary public-private partnerships.
- D5.** Share best practices on policies, programs, funding opportunities and outreach through a free, publicly accessible online clearinghouse.
- D6.** Coordinate domestic and international interests.

### Objective E: Standardize Measurement and Increase Data Collection

Different definitions and measurement practices create challenges in setting goals and tracking progress. We need more consistent methodologies to measure recycling system performance.

- E1.** Develop and implement national recycling system definitions, measures, targets and performance indicators.
- E2.** Create a tracking and reporting plan.
- E3.** Create recycled content measures.
- E4.** Coordinate domestic and international measurement efforts.
- E5.** Increase data availability and transparency about recyclable materials generated and the materials manufacturers need.

### Next Steps

Over the coming months, EPA will work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop a plan for implementing the *2021 Strategy*. EPA will ensure communities have a seat at the table and are involved in both developing the implementation plan and executing the actions in this strategy. EPA is also committing to developing a new goal to reduce the climate impacts from materials use and consumption, which will complement existing national goals on recycling and food waste reduction. EPA plans to collaborate across all levels of government, including tribal nations, and with public and private stakeholders to achieve these ambitious goals.