

THE RECYCLING PARTNERSHIP

Hearing on “Plastic Waste Reduction and Recycling Research: Moving from Staggering Statistics to Sustainable Solutions”

Statement for the Record

House Subcommittee on Research and Technology

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement into the hearing record for the House Subcommittee on Research and Technology Hearing on “Plastic Waste Reduction and Recycling Research: Moving from Staggering Statistics to Sustainable Solutions.”

I am CEO of [The Recycling Partnership](#), a national nonprofit that works with companies, communities, and policymakers to strengthen U.S. community recycling programs. Our organization recently launched a recent campaign in D.C. to boost recycling – that was an example of the type of grants we give and how we partner with cities across the country. The Recycling Partnership is seven years old, rooted in action, and designed to bring together the public and private sectors because without coordination, recycling will never deliver the solutions we all need.

How does The Partnership work? We engage companies in funding community-based solutions because we know that when we invest in a system that creates jobs, fuels U.S. manufacturing, protects resources, and creates equitable access to sustainability, everyone wins.

Recycling is when something old becomes something new again – what we need to ensure is that is by *plan*, not just by *chance*, as is the current case.

And we’re here today to talk about how to execute that plan, a shared vision for the future – one of a circular economy, moving away from taking raw materials from the planet, making stuff out of it, all just to bury all that value back in the ground after one use.

We’re talking about moving that linear economy towards a circular system, where we take the everyday products that all of us use and bring them back into the economy by this reverse supply chain that we call recycling.

Recycling isn't just the thing that happens when you toss a box or a bottle into the cart – it's that and everything that comes after that step, a series of loosely connected, yet highly interdependent players. Public and private players, working together.

It's the community-run truck that empties that recycling cart, the for-profit facility that sorts it all out and sells bales of cans, paper, and plastic containers to mills and reclaimers. Those companies then transform the material into manufacturing feedstock. Committee members, that's what recycling is all about – turning old stuff into feedstock for manufacturing. New products that go back onto store shelves for us to bring back into our homes and start the cycle all over again.

And all those communities and companies – with hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of economic activity – need each of those disparate parts to work together, effectively. And as you may have heard in headlines over the past several years, recycling has faced a lot of barriers that it needs help to overcome and to address those challenges, we recently released a report that you may be interested in – [‘Paying It Forward – How Investing in Recycling Will Pay Dividends’](#) outlines how to fix the U.S. recycling system, connect all those pieces, and deliver rewards to the environment and the U.S. economy.

When it comes to plastics, technology has an important role to play in answering important questions about the future of our nation's recycling system. How can we better design the plastic products that are being produced with the labels, inks and adhesives on them?; how can we take the different kinds of resins in the marketplace and make them more a more circular economy?; how can we develop standards to make sure the businesses across the country know what quality of recycled feedstock they're getting; and how, exactly, those bales of different plastics can be used by U.S. businesses?

Like businesses in all of your states. UNIFI in North Carolina, turning soda and water bottles into recycled fiber for clothing and other applications; Polywood in Indiana, making outdoor furniture out of detergent bottles; Envision Plastics in California capturing ocean-bound plastics and producing feedstock to make shampoo bottles for Method Soap in Illinois; Schupan in Michigan, Indorama in Texas and Alpek in Pennsylvania turning soda and water bottles into, well, new soda and water bottles.

Each of those businesses must overcome technical barriers to become profitable and grow. We need research to turn those technical barriers into bridges from the consumer to the recycling cart, through the system back to the consumer again – helping create a circular economy, not by chance, but by plan.

We commend the Committee for its attention to helping support this plan to support a circular system. I hope this Committee hears that this country needs research that focuses on system solutions, understanding that there are no silver bullets, and that speed of scale is necessary to stop the plastics waste problem.

Thank you for inviting The Recycling Partnership to testify before the Committee. We look forward to working with you on solutions that create jobs and protect our planet and its people.