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October 28, 2022

Dear Ms. Sullivan,

We are deeply concerned that your October 24, 2022 article "[Recycling Plastic Is Practically Impossible – And The Problem Is Getting Worse](#)" will exacerbate the issue of plastic waste. The article's title leads readers to wonder why even make the effort to recycle. This is the opposite reaction needed to address the issue of plastic waste. Instead, we should ask how to improve recycling.

Recyclables are recycled

The opening statement suggests that "[t]he vast majority of plastic...put into blue recycling bins, is headed to landfills..." That is not true. Our members own the majority of recycling facilities in the country. And we can confirm: Recyclables gets recycled. That needs to be made clear.

Not only that, recyclables have value. The index pricing for PET reached as high as \$1000 per ton and Natural HDPE reached \$2000 per ton this year. That is higher than the price for steel cans or cardboard.

To recover this material, the recycling industry has invested heavily in infrastructure improvements to capture more material. And those investments continue - recent announcements indicate that planned investments for recycling facilities are in the billions of dollars.

What is recyclable in most areas are plastic bottles and jars. Anything else should be confirmed with the local authority.

Not everything is recyclable

Some plastics are not recyclable. Those materials are not accepted at the recycling facilities. If the public puts non-recyclable materials into their recycling bin, then yes, that will get landfilled. However, that is a small amount of material.

We encourage brand owners to utilize recyclable packaging. We encourage the public to consider the environmental impacts of packaging in their purchase decisions. Our members provide public education about what packaging is recyclable to reduce non-recyclable materials making their way into the recycling bin.

Recycling cannot compete with virgin materials

When the price of virgin materials goes up, recycling goes up. And when the price for virgin materials go down, recycling prices also go down. This is true for all commodities: metal, plastic and paper. For instance, prior to the pandemic, mixed paper prices were negative for over a year. But mixed paper prices recovered at the outset of COVID due to increased demand for consumer goods and supply chain issues.
Recycling prices are volatile

Recycling prices can be high one day drop the next. This year has seen drops of 80% of the material value for some commodities. A reliable end market with reduced volatility is desirable.

Stabilizing prices is possible by requiring packaging to include recycled content. Minimum recycled content legislation have passed in a number of locations including New Jersey. This will ensure that recyclables are in demand even when virgin prices drop.

We don't believe that plastic is going away. Instead, we are investing in solutions such as encouraging plastic recycling and requiring minimum content in the packaging. Rather than focusing on a world without plastic, we are focused on a world without plastic pollution. Rigid plastic packaging is highly recyclable and we want more of it in our recycling bins. Other plastics such as composite, multi-material and other non-recyclable plastic should be managed through comprehensive and safe disposal systems.

Sincerely,

Darrell K. Smith
President & CEO
National Waste & Recycling Association