

## **White Paper for 2015 National Recycling Coalition Sustainable Materials Management Summit**

**Participant:** Phil Bresee, Director of Recycling, City of Philadelphia

**Background:** I have worked in the SMM field at the local government level for 24 years. I've developed and implemented recycling and waste reduction programs from the ground-up, and have guided my jurisdictions through numerous programmatic and policy changes. This background and leadership experience in State Recycling Organizations (SROs) has allowed me to be engaged in and have a solid understanding of SMM policy issues. I'm a frequent presenter and panelist at national, regional and state-level conferences and meetings, and have published articles in trade journals.

Since mid-2012 I've been the director of recycling for the City of Philadelphia, the fifth-largest city in the U.S. With collections from some 530,000 households, Philadelphia operates one of the largest collection programs in the U.S. Philadelphia's recycling program has experienced a 170 percent increase in program tonnages during the past seven years. From 2004 until 2012 I was the recycling program manager for Broward County Florida, the 18<sup>th</sup> largest county in the U.S. Here I directed programs and initiatives on behalf of the county, 26 cities, and the Broward public schools system. Prior to my move to Florida, I managed recycling programs in Frederick and then Howard County, Maryland.

As noted above, I've held elected leadership positions in statewide recycling associations, including as Chair of Recycle Florida Today, and as President of the Maryland Recyclers Coalition. I hold a B.S. in Political Science and pursued my MBA.

### **National SMM Plan Thoughts & Recommendations:**

**Bolster access to and development of sustainable and value-added recovered materials end-markets:** The emergence of China's "Green Fence", the slowing of that's nation's economic growth, and the recent dock workers strike in west coast ports have contributed to erosion of recovered materials market values to levels not seen in years. These issues underscore our over-commitment to export markets, and should call attention to the need to invest in domestic end-market capacity.

Moreover, too many of our recovered materials are "down-cycled", especially glass, which can make up 25-30% of a municipal recycling program's recycling stream. The relatively low recovery rates and down-cycling of glass make up the biggest "dirty little secret" in municipal recycling programs. These challenges have existed for more than 20 years (pre-dating single-stream), and it's more important than ever that stakeholders – including brands and the glass packaging industry – help develop and support sustainable market and policy-based solutions. (A/B)

**Strengthen partnerships and collaboration among recycling value chain members.** There has been considerable progress on this front during the past few years, and many brands and product manufacturers have committed funding to help improve recycling infrastructure. However, changes in packaging are occurring at a much more rapid pace than changes in processing technology, infrastructure, and market development. There needs to be more synchronization between upstream product and packaging and product design and downstream recovery (which increasingly must be accomplished using processing infrastructure that was designed for a markedly different materials stream). (D)

**Invest in and reduce the burden of managing end-of-life materials by local governments.** Curbside collection of recyclables at the local level provides a critical (and first) touch point

between citizens and SMM (and environmental awareness in general). Unfortunately, local government recycling and SMM programs have to continuously compete for scarce resources against other important causes, and with other departments and entities. Moreover, many programs have recently been negatively impacted by global and macro-economic events such as reduced GDP growth in China, falling oil prices, etc. The fiscal benefit formula of recyclables revenues plus avoided disposal savings has changed drastically, and long-term low value of recovered materials could threaten many local government programs. Combinations of public policy, third party investment, and some forms of producer responsibility that help re-stimulate the value of recovered materials, and buffer local governments from negative economic impacts that are beyond their control, need to be examined. (A/B)

**More fully integrate recovered materials-reliant and SMM industries into local economic development strategies.** The job creation and value added economic benefits of recycling over traditional disposal are among its most important attributes. However, in many communities the only jobs created through recycling are for collectors and processing facility staff. SMM and recycling-related job creation and economic activity that primarily accrue overseas will not mobilize the necessary political support needed to maximize recovery and build a more circular economy.