

Suzette Thomason and Dave Keeling
STEEL RECYCLING INSTITUTE

The Steel Recycling Institute (SRI) seeks to promote and implement development of enhanced Sustainable Materials Management (SMM).

Steel and other manufacturing industries are the backbone of our economy as well as our standard of living. A strong manufacturing sector creates significant benefits for society, including good-paying jobs, investment in research and development and critical materials for infrastructure and national defense.

As North America's most recycled material, steel inherently supports the needs of SMM. Steel leads the way in practical recycling and its contribution to sustainability, including steel cans, but also building and highway construction (structural and rebar), major appliances, trains, automobiles, machinery, and even bicycles. Clearly, steel is a resilient and durable material in all of its applications.

At end of life, steel products enjoy excellent recycling achievements. Extended Producer Responsibility is not needed for steel to draw in its material through the extensive scrap recovery and processing infrastructure across the nation. Steel's magnetic properties facilitate transportation, handling, and automatic sorting (in auto shredders, material recovery facilities and waste to energy plants).

Steel is also helping buildings "reuse" the structural steel from dismantled projects. Innovative architects are providing steel designs that have "built-in" specifications calling for the use of steel recovered from existing structures, and then integrated into the construction of new steel superstructures for buildings.

Another example for steel contributions past, present, and future, is in the automotive sector. Currently, steel comprises nearly 60% of the total weight of the modern vehicle. Cars are obliged by the US EPA to meet increasingly stringent fuel economy standards. Steel has responded vigorously with the development of advanced high strength steel (AHSS) alloys that require less steel for a given application and thus less weight, providing better fuel economy; all without compromising safety and affordability, and all as continually recyclable as any other steel product.

Steel containers are in virtually all community recycling programs throughout the land. While the collection rates are very good for steel cans in curbside and drop-off programs, more outreach is needed to motivate the private citizen to get all steel cans into the bin. One factor now helping to increase overall steel can collections is the SRI program which encourages the addition of empty steel aerosol cans and empty steel paint cans to recycling programs.

National SMM Plan Recommendations: As the national plan is developed, the steel industry encourages the inclusion of the following initiatives: (1) maximize steel can diversion with the addition of empty aerosol and paint cans to the steel can mix collected in all recycling programs, with appropriate outreach to the public, (2) where practical, encourage the reuse of steel recovered from disassembly of existing structures, and (3) continue to develop high strength steel alloys that require less steel for a given application and thus less weight, providing better fuel economy and inherent strength and safety in automotive applications.