Recycling

Rationale

Recycling is defined in different ways by different states, municipalities, and industry sectors. These differences in terminology can lead to confusion when trying to measure the recycling rates of certain commodities and the success of programs. As a result, using data to effectively evaluate and communicate the performance and achievements of recycling programs can be difficult.

It is critically important that we adopt and promote a single, simple definition of recycling if we are to continue to improve recycling in this country. Preserving the quality of recyclable materials--from collection through production into new products--will ultimately expand both the supply and the demand for recyclable supplies for the world's manufacturing industries. We can begin to help this process by using a universally agreed upon definition of recycling:

Policy

"Recycling is a series of activities by which material that has reached the end of its current use is processed into material utilized in the production of new products."

The National Recycling Coalition believes that the following basic principles and corollaries flow from that definition:

1. **Policies on Processing Activities**
   Processes and activities that harm the growth of recycled materials output and markets and should not be considered recycling.
   a. As defined above, recycling results from a number of activities that, taken together, transforms a potentially recyclable material into a new product containing recycled materials. The activities include (but are not limited to) the collection, processing and consumption of the material in a manufacturing process.
   b. Each activity is critical to the ultimate success of recycling. Thus, collection of recyclables without their ultimate consumption in a manufacturing process to produce new material is not recycling.
   c. Mixing recyclable materials with garbage during collection reduces the flow of high quality materials needed to transform recyclable materials into recycled materials. While this may change in the future with emerging technologies, the experience today is that diminished input quality results in diminished production volumes. Processes and activities that harm the growth of recycled materials output and markets are not considered recycling.
   d. Regardless of the collection, sorting and processing method, in order for a particular practice to be considered recycling, the system must produce

marketable materials which meet the demand side of the industry's standards for use in a manufacturing process, thereby supporting the profitable sustenance and growth of recycled content products.

2. Degree of Flexibility in Meeting Needs to Produce Recycled Commodities

a. Additional efforts are needed by all stakeholders involved in recycling – including both public and private entities – to find ways to increase collection rates for recyclables.
b. No single waste management approach is suitable for managing all waste streams in all circumstances when looking at opportunities to initiate, sustain, and/or increase recycling.
c. EPA has provided some guidance for which activities constitute recycling. For example, off-site composting is considered recycling, while backyard composting is considered source reduction.

3. New Technologies

a. Promotion of new technologies and systems for increasing recycling through increased volumes and quality is critical. However, promotion of new technologies must be done in a way that does not compromise the efficacy of any one of the activities necessary for successful recycling to occur. As such, recyclable materials should be collected in a manner that optimizes the value and utilization of the material. This is necessary in order to meet the quality requirements of those involved in the use of the recyclables to manufacture new products, and prevents the recyclable material from being discarded.

4. **Exclusions**

a. This definition excludes the use of these materials:
    - As a fuel substitute;
    - for energy production;
    - and/or alternative daily cover.

5. The Benefits of Recycling

a. Maintaining the current large job base in the overall recycling network as well as the creation of new well-paying jobs in the recycling and manufacturing industries in the United States;
b. Reduction in the amount of waste sent to landfills or waste to energy facilities;
c. Conservation of non-renewable natural resources such as water and minerals;
d. Prevention of pollution by reducing the need to collect new raw materials;
e. Conservation of energy;
f. Reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions known to contribute to global climate change; and,
g. Preservation of the environment for future generations.