Market-Based Solutions Drive Paper and Packaging Recovery Efforts

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Background:

Thanks to voluntary recycling programs, industry leadership and the efforts of millions of Americans who recycle at home, work and school every day, the national paper recovery rate has doubled since 1990. Despite this unparalleled, industry-led progress, state and local governments are considering measures such as traditional extended producer responsibility (EPR) programs that put the burden of collection and end-of-life disposition of packaging and printed paper on brand owners and manufacturers.

Recently EPR supporters advocated for related policies such as landfill/disposal bans, recycling mandates, food service packaging bans, bottle bills, container bans, product taxes, waste directives and product-specific fees or bans on packaging or printed paper.

AF&PA supports:

• Voluntary paper and paper-based packaging recovery efforts; and
• Improving and expanding existing recovery and recycling programs.

AF&PA opposes EPR and related policies because they:

• Paper is not a hazardous or hard-to-handle material;

• Materials with high rates of recovery for recycling are penalized along with those with lower rates; and

• Government intervention will increase costs for consumers and disrupt efficient markets for recyclable commodities.

Paper Recycling in the U.S.

• Paper is recycled at a high rate: Each year since 2009, 63 percent or more of paper used in the U.S. has been recovered for recycling and in 2018 the paper recovery rate reached 68.1 percent.

• Markets for recovered fiber are well-developed: The amount of paper going to landfills has declined by nearly half since 2000.

  • Global demand for recovered fiber has been growing at a rapid rate. Global recovered paper demand increased at an average rate of 1 percent a year from 2014 to 2018 and is expected by RISI to increase an average of 1.5 percent a year from 2019 through 2023.
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- The recovered paper market rebounded after China’s abrupt import restrictions on recovered paper caused the paper recovery rate to dip in 2017. Fortunately, recovered fiber markets are complex, efficient and extremely resilient. The paper and paper-packaging industry continues to innovate and adapt to market demands and is increasing the use of recovered paper to make new products.

- Consumer access to paper recycling is high: In 2014, 96 percent of Americans had access to community curbside and/or drop-off paper recycling programs.

Continued Industry-Led Efforts

The industry’s sustainability initiative, Better Practices, Better Planet 2020, includes a goal to exceed a 70 percent rate of paper recovery for recycling by 2020.

For more information on the industry’s sustainability goals and resources to improve paper recycling efforts, visit www.afandpa.org/sustainability and www.paperrecycles.org.