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Paper Recycling and COVID-19

American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) members are committed to the safety of our workforce and continuing to deliver essential products to consumers. Our number one priority is working with members to ensure that workers are safe and healthy, so that our industry can continue to supply essential products for those who are on the front lines of this crisis.

AF&PA members make numerous products for everyday living, including tissue products, pulp used in diapers and other personal hygiene products, papers for communication and education, building/construction products, and packaging for food, beverages, foodservice, cleaning supplies, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and other consumer products, and shipping boxes that get those products to market.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) situation is highly dynamic and changing daily, and the industry is working diligently to respond to demand to meet the needs of consumers, especially the demand for tissue products, packaged

Our industry relies on recovered fiber to continue manufacturing the packaging needed to maintain supply chains supporting grocers and other businesses in delivering essential goods to consumers. It is important that recycling remains an essential service and that municipalities continue to operate residential recycling programs as they are able to by following the Center for Disease Control guidelines, through this difficult period.

food/beverages, cleaning supplies and medicine. Disruptions in the availability of these goods would cause significant hardships to consumers who depend on steady and stable supplies.

To meet demand, paper recovery for recycling is essential.

Nationwide, more than a third of the paper industry's total fiber requirements are met using recovered material. For some products, the share of recovered fiber used in manufacturing is much higher. For example, the manufacturing of both tissue products and corrugated packaging – the boxes used to ship produce and packaged goods to grocery stores – uses a significant percentage of recovered fiber. Since tissue products and packaging for food and other essential products are made with recovered fiber, our members need a steady supply of recovered fiber. Our industry relies on recovered fiber to continue manufacturing the tissue needed by consumers and packaging needed to maintain supply chains supporting grocers, healthcare practitioners and other businesses in delivering essential goods to consumers.

Unfortunately, like many industries, the COVID-19 pandemic has shocked the recycling industry. Among many changes, we are seeing:

- A decline in the volume of recovered fiber from institutional, commercial and industrial facilities, many of which are experiencing reduced operations or are shut down (schools, hotels, factories, etc.).

- A volume shift of recovered office papers from office buildings to residential, as many American workers shelter

at home. Typically, the recovery rate for materials in residential recycling streams is lower than in commercial streams.

- The suspension of residential curbside recycling collection (or diversion of collected recyclable material to landfill) in some municipalities as communities deal with labor shortages.

Although the recovered fiber supply stream is experiencing disruptions, markets are adapting and the demand for it remains strong.

AF&PA members that are unable to access recovered paper for use in manufacturing are substituting virgin wood fiber pulp as needed to continue to make the products that Americans rely on such as e-commerce boxes, over-the-counter medicine boxes and toilet paper. However, the global market for virgin wood fiber pulp is experiencing disruptions as well, as several mills have announced temporary closures over the last few weeks.

What AF&PA and Our Members are Doing:

- AF&PA member companies are prioritizing worker safety, emphasizing a long-held commitment to safety and training.

- AF&PA is supplying online resources and information, including workplace safety guidance from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and guidance on the safety of packaging, mail and other paper products from the CDC, Food and Drug Administration, and the U.S. Surgeon General.

- AF&PA ensured that recycling was also considered an essential service in the recent Department of Homeland Security CISA guidance.

- AF&PA is conducting outreach to municipalities, discussing the importance of recycling to our industry's continuing commitment to sustainability and urging them to protect worker safety by following guidance from the CDC.

What policymakers can do:

As Congress works on legislative packages, they should consider including funding for recycling to ensure that residential curbside collection is prepared to meet challenges created by COVID-19, including:

- After needs of emergency personnel and medical services are met, support the health and safety of the municipal recycling workforce with short-term funding for personal protective equipment to ensure that the collection, sortation and processing of recyclable materials can continue.

- Funding for EPA to establish a competitive grant program to improve the effectiveness of residential and community recycling programs through public education and outreach (the RECYCLE Act).

- Short-term federal funding *only* for municipal recycling programs facing mission-critical budget deficits brought on by the COVID-19 crisis. Funds to be used to:

  - Maintain consumer access to residential curbside and drop-off recycling programs.

  - Provide recycling education programs to educate consumers on the right way to recycle (especially related to an increase in recyclable material received at home during COVID-19).

  Funds should not be used to:

  - Build new municipal recycling infrastructure with federal tax dollars.

To learn more about how AF&PA is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, visit https://www.afandpa.org/covid-19