



# Recycling Steering Committee

*Modernizing Oregon's recycling system with support from Oregon Consensus*

## Modernizing Oregon's Recycling System, 9/12/19

### **How has recycling changed recently?**

Unprecedented disruptions in international markets for the materials collected for recycling have affected Oregon's ability to recycle in nearly all parts of the state. For many years, China and other Southeast Asian countries had been taking mixed paper and plastic recyclables from Oregon, much of the U.S. and around the world for use in manufacturing. In 2017, China began to restrict materials coming their way — as the recyclables shipped to them contained too much non-recyclable waste — in an attempt to clean up their environment. Many other countries followed China's lead.

### **How has this impacted local recycling programs?**

In response to the market disruptions, some local recycling programs have removed items that are no longer cost effective to recycle, increased garbage and recycling service bills to cover increased costs, or both. These changes have increased awareness of our recycling practices and signaled that it is time to update and modernize Oregon's recycling system at the state and local levels. It is more important than ever to understand what can be recycled and make sure we recycle right. Read more at: <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/recycling/Pages/Recycle-Right.aspx>.

### **Why is recycling important?**

Recycling gives materials a second life, and in doing so, creates jobs, reduces pollution and is gentler on the planet than creating products from virgin resources. In 2016, Oregon recycled 1.4 million tons of materials, which prevented 3.1 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent from being released into the atmosphere — the equivalent of removing 674,000 cars from the road for a year. Oregon has a long history of recycling — nearly 40 years. Oregonians want to do their part to help protect the environment, and recycling is important to them.

However, environmental impacts happen at all stages of the life cycle of materials, including during production, use and disposal. Oregon is working toward a future where we produce and use materials responsibly while conserving resources, protecting the environment and living well. To learn more about this work and where recycling fits in, read about Oregon's 2050 Vision and Framework for Action:

<https://www.oregon.gov/deq/FilterDocs/MManagementOR.pdf>.

### **How is the state responding?**

DEQ has brought together players responsible for Oregon's recycling system including local and state governments, businesses, and other organizations, through the Recycling Steering Committee. The work is supported by Oregon Consensus, a program of Portland State University

The Recycling Steering Committee is a collaborative of representation from the Assoc. of Oregon Counties, Assoc. of Oregon Recyclers, Assoc. of Plastics Recyclers/Denton Plastics, EFI Recycling, Far West Recycling, Lane County, League of Oregon Cities, Metro, NORPAC, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Oregon Refuse & Recycling Assoc., City of Portland, Recycling Partnership, Rogue Disposal & Recycling, Waste Connections, and Waste Management. For more information, visit <https://go.usa.gov/xmYYe>.

and the National Policy Consensus Center, which brings community members, government representatives and businesses together to solve problems and plan for the future.

The Recycling Steering Committee has been working with DEQ to identify what Oregon's future recycling system should look like, conduct research to inform decisions and — by summer 2020 — recommend changes to achieve that future system. The Steering Committee has completed an assessment of the problems in our current recycling system, is conducting ongoing research to understand alternatives, and will identify how the future system needs to work to be successful.

### **What is the committee doing?**

The committee will make recommendations that could address:

- Changes in laws and policies supporting and guiding Oregon's recycling system.
- Methods and facilities needed to collect, sort and process those materials for markets.
- Which materials should be the focus for recycling.
- How to provide guidance to residents and businesses on how to recycle and encourage them to do it correctly.

Throughout this work, the committee will look to balance economic and social needs from all parts of the state, existing systems and infrastructure, and the needs for the future.

### **How do I learn more?**

To learn more about the committee, visit <https://go.usa.gov/xmYYe>.