



What is Extended Producer Responsibility?

Key Takeaways:

EPR programs have brand owners, producers, and manufacturers pay to recycle or dispose of their products. Paper is one of the most widely recycled materials in the U.S. The paper industry is working to capture even more paper from the waste stream for recycling. Paper recycling rates in the U.S. have consistently increased in recent decades.

This handout covers:



The definition of
Extended Producer
Responsibility



The role of paper in
EPR programs



Our industry's
investment to improve
paper recycling



Our recommendation
for EPR programs

What is an Extended Producer Responsibility Program?

Extended Producer Responsibility, or EPR, is the concept where brand owners, producers, and material manufacturers **pay for the end-of-life costs to recycle or dispose of products they put on the market.**

Types of EPR are in place in countries around the world, including in Europe and Canada. It's also in place in the U.S. too. Fees for producers vary based on the EPR program. Generally, fees might help cover:

- Material collection
- Waste disposal
- Technology upgrades
- Educational materials
- Program administration
- Development of recycling end-markets



Has Extended Producer Responsibility Been Implemented Before in the U.S.?

Yes, EPR programs are already in place in the U.S. In many instances, the EPR program is for **hard-to-recycle materials like batteries, paint, electronics and mattresses.**

Canada and Europe have similar EPR policies for these types of products as well. EPR programs can be effective when:

- Products are difficult to process
- Products have low recycling rates
- Healthy end markets do not exist

However, **these issues don't apply to paper and paper-based packaging in the U.S.**

What is the Paper Industry's Role in Extended Producer Responsibility Programs?

EPR programs can be an effective way to improve recycling for materials with low recycling rates. One-size-fits-all EPR proposals don't distinguish between materials that are highly recycled – like paper and paper packaging products – and those that aren't.

Paper is one of the most widely recycled materials in America. Paper recycling rates in the U.S. are consistently high and have increased in recent decades. Our industry recycles paper from industrial, commercial, institutional and residential streams.



By any metric, paper is a recycling success story:

We recycled around **45 million tons of paper** in the U.S. in 2025. That's 123,000 tons per day.

79% of Americans have access to a community residential-curbide recycling program, making it easy to recycle paper and cardboard at home.

Robust and resilient end markets already exist for recycled paper. Meaning, when we recover used paper, we're turning it into new products like boxes and tissue.



DID YOU KNOW:

Most U.S. paper mills use recycled paper to make new products. Recycled paper makes packaging for food and medicine, shipping materials, tissue products like toilet paper and paper towels, and office and newspapers.

80%

About 80% of U.S. paper mills use recycled paper to make new products

What Has the Paper Industry Done to Improve Paper Recycling?

Investing in and improving paper recycling has been an industry priority for decades. The paper industry is working to capture even more paper from the waste stream for recycling.

Our industry:

Set Voluntary Goals:

The U.S. paper industry set its first recycling goal in 1990 to improve paper recycling rates. We recycle nearly 60% more paper today than we did in 1990.

Works to Increase the Use of Recycled Paper:

We've committed to using even more recycled paper in new paper products by 2030. And we're backing that up with action: During 2019-2025, our industry invested in projects at paper mills that will use over 4.5 million tons of recycled paper.

Advocates for Strong Residential Recycling:

AF&PA and our members are strong advocates for residential recycling programs. We work with stakeholders and partners who encourage community involvement to increase recycling access and improve education.

Has an Ownership Stake in Recycling:

AF&PA members own and operate more than 100 materials recovery facilities (MRFs) nationwide. That's where recyclables are sorted and processed.

Invests in Education, Resources and Research:

In the 1990s, AF&PA created a program to help promote paper recycling in the U.S., which is still ongoing today. Our industry also tested and found pizza boxes and all-paper padded mailers can be successfully recycled at paper mills.



Improving Recycling Systems Requires Data-Driven Solutions

Waste and recycling management is complex because of things like:



Geographic region



Differences in what's accepted based on community, city, county and state jurisdiction



Difference in waste management companies



Proximity to/amount of materials recovery facilities



Housing type

Product manufacturing and the supply chain is also complex and crosses state lines. For example, recycled paper can be shipped to a paper mill in a different state. What's accepted by paper mills might not be accepted in local communities.

Robust data helps states understand what's working well within their recycling system so they can maximize success and minimize harm. They also identify issues the state needs to work on in the future.

States need to have as much information as possible about the current waste, recycling and materials management systems before considering EPR programs.



About AF&PA

The American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) serves to advance public policies that foster economic growth, job creation and global competitiveness for a vital sector that makes the essential paper and packaging products Americans use every day. The U.S. forest products industry employs more than 925,000 people, largely in rural America, and is among the top 10 manufacturing sector employers in 44 states. Our industry accounts for approximately 4.7% of the total U.S. manufacturing GDP, manufacturing more than \$435 billion in products annually. AF&PA member companies are significant producers and users of renewable biomass energy and are committed to making sustainable products for a sustainable future through the industry's decades-long initiative — *Better Practices, Better Planet 2030*.

