



**The State of Recycling Address 2015**  
**Delivered by Jennifer Jehn, President & CEO, Keep America Beautiful**  
**America Recycles Day Congressional Briefing**  
**Nov. 18, 2015**

Hello, and thank you to Congressman Shimkus and Congressman Pallone for hosting today's briefing.

It is a pleasure to be here, and I thank you for your interest in recycling.

For those of you who are not familiar with Keep America Beautiful, our mission is to inspire and educate people to take action EVERY DAY to improve and beautify their community environment. We envision a country where every community is a clean, green, and beautiful place to live.

Keep America Beautiful provides the expertise, programs and resources to help people end littering in America, *increase recycling in America*, and to beautify America's communities.

Our organization is driven by the work and passion of more than 600 state and community-based Keep America Beautiful affiliates, state recycling organization partners, and millions of volunteers. We accomplish our work with the support of corporate partners, municipalities, public officials as well as individuals.

The work we do helps to champion communities that are economically sound, environmentally healthy and socially connected.

We've been working to make beauty our lasting signature since 1953.

This past Sunday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, marked the 18<sup>th</sup> America Recycles Day, a Keep America Beautiful national initiative. It is the only nationally recognized day dedicated to promoting and celebrating the benefits of recycling in the U.S.

At a time when recycling has been in the news, our primary concern at Keep America Beautiful is that we continue to encourage the American people to recycle.

Recycling plays an important role in sustainable materials management, and we will continue to educate, motivate and activate people to better understand the “how, what, where and why” of recycling today and in the future.

We must all be unified in helping to encourage the American people to recycle, while working together to address the challenges to make recycling even more successful.

America Recycles Day provides a platform designed to motivate people in communities nationwide to take action to recycle more and recycle smarter -- at work, at school, at home and on-the-go.

With Keep America Beautiful’s support, recycling ambassadors from communities across the country recruit thousands of organizations, including schools, colleges and universities, businesses, and government entities, to get involved in educating residents of all ages about recycling resources in their community.

While Robin addressed some of the business aspects of recycling, I’d like to provide some insights on a part of the recycling landscape that impacts the daily life of most Americans.

So let’s briefly discuss municipal solid waste recycling — the curbside and/or drop-off recycling that you and I take advantage of — as do millions of people across America every day.

There are many aspects to municipal solid waste recycling that must work in coordination -- including collection, processing and marketing to send quality recycled materials back to manufacturers for use in creating new products.

As I said earlier, we know there are challenges our country faces when it comes to recycling, but there is also very real progress being made to make recycling sustainable and more successful.

It’s true that while the act of recycling is a simple one, the business of recycling is riddled with complexities.

Recycling is an important part of our nation’s waste management strategy — providing an effective means of reducing reliance on landfills, preserving natural resources, protecting the environment and transforming end-of-life products into valuable materials.

Here’s some information about the state of municipal recycling:

According to the EPA’s current data, each of us in the U.S. generates 4.4 pounds of trash per person per day.

In 2013, that added up to all of us generating a total of 254 million tons of “trash.”

The good news is that about 87 million tons of this material was either recycled or composted, which is equivalent to a 34.3 percent recycling rate.

This recycling and composting prevented the release of approximately 186 million metric tons of carbon dioxide; comparable to taking over 39 million cars off the road for a year.

Progress on recycling grew rapidly from the late 1980s through to 2010, as thousands of communities added recycling as part of their integrated waste management services.

Since 2010, however, we've stalled around the 34 percent recycling rate, so there's an opportunity to improve and build new momentum.

Here is the reality: a lot of material that can be recycled is still going to landfills. The question is how can we effectively and efficiently capture, transport and process the recyclable materials to be used to make new products?

One of the factors enabling us to achieve our current recycling rate is the progress we've made over the past few decades to increase access to recycling at the curbside.

It's estimated that nearly 80 percent of the population now has access to curbside recycling.

One footnote: Even though there is "access" to curbside recycling, this doesn't mean each of these households has a recycling bin and are using it.

We know that one of the primary levers to increase recycling is convenience.

So the solid waste recycling industry has worked to make it easier and developed what is called a "single-stream" system – that means you have one bin for your garbage and one bin for your recyclables.

Not only does a "single-stream" system make recycling more convenient for residents, but it also streamlines collection and can reduce operational costs.

With growing public interest in recycling, more material is being put in the recycling bins. The challenge — and it's a costly one — is that we're not always recycling the right materials.

Separating the wrong materials from the right ones after they've been mixed together adds technological challenges and costs.

As one industry expert describes – it's like taking a scrambled egg and trying to separate the yolk from the egg white. It can get messy.

The good news is the solid waste industry continues to innovate and technological advancements continue to support separating materials at recycling centers.

Our staff here in Washington recently visited a materials recovery facility — often referred to as a “MURPH” — in Manassas, Virginia.

As we were watching the materials go from the recycling truck onto the conveyor belt to be separated – via machines and hand sorting – the conveyor belt was stopped.

The plant manager explained that the equipment has to be stopped for 15 minutes every two hours so the machinery can be cleaned of contamination by the items that aren’t recyclable.

Not only is this a worker safety issue, but it adds a significant cost – over \$1 million annually for this facility alone.

So cleaning up the recycling stream by helping people better understand how to recycle right will certainly help improve the economics of recycling.

Product packaging is also changing rapidly.

Changes in packaging from light-weighting to multi-layered packaging — and even the introduction of new kinds of materials — creates additional challenges for the recycling equipment that was built to sort more basic materials like paper, simple plastics, metals and glass.

The National Waste and Recycling Association — whose member companies represent the private waste haulers and recyclers who collect and process a large percentage of the municipal recycling in America — often notes that we use 18 million tons less of printed paper today than we did a decade ago.

Kevin Kraushaar, NWRA’s Head of Government Affairs, is with us today and I thank them for their collaboration with Keep America Beautiful.

Another factor currently challenging the industry, which Robin discussed, is how fluctuations in commodity prices significantly influence recycling markets.

To make recycling sustainable, the economic benefits are as vital as the environmental benefits. As the global demand for commodities grows again – and most experts assume that growing population and improved standards of living for developing countries will push future demand – it bodes well for the economic value of recycled materials.

In addition, as part of sustainable materials management, there is a shift from a mindset of a linear “take, make, waste” to a more circular approach: How do we keep materials in the economy and creating value?

Some of the challenges of today’s recycling landscape are temporary, some cyclical, and others will be addressed through innovation.

None of them, however, are reasons to give up on or to discourage recycling. We are a nation that knows how to solve problems.

Innovation in recycling is so important — whether it is product design for end of life, improving the collection system and infrastructure, or advancing the technology used in processing recyclables.

Our friends at the American Chemistry Council recognize companies and nonprofits that successfully bring new technologies, products, and initiatives to communities and the marketplace that demonstrate significant advancements in plastics recycling.

I want to point out two of this year’s winners of the annual “Innovation in Plastics Recycling Awards,” who are represented here today:

Demilec Inc. converts P.E.T. (think plastic bottles) scrap into a product that can be used in spray foam insulation products.

The company has recycled more than 300 million plastic bottles into spray foam insulation products in the past few years.

Also with us is The Recycling Partnership, a nonprofit that facilitates public-private partnerships to boost curbside recycling programs.

Over the last 15 months, The Recycling Partnership has provided 115,000 large recycling carts to improve recycling in four cities: Florence, Alabama; Columbia, South Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; and East Lansing, Michigan.

On behalf of all of us, congratulations for your efforts.

At Keep America Beautiful, we’re also very proud to share a recycling success story from one of America’s great cities.

The City of Chicago has been working for the past few years to provide recycling carts to each single-family household.

As part of a public-private partnership between Keep America Beautiful, Keep Chicago Beautiful and Coca-Cola, the City was able to meet that goal in 2013.

In 2014, by recycling rather than landfilling 100,000 tons of recyclables, Chicagoans reduced Greenhouse Gas emissions by 220,000 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e (carbon dioxide equivalent).

And that’s just one measure of the environmental benefits.

There is also positive impact to the City's bottom line — Chicago is saving nearly \$5 million in avoided landfill costs.

As commodity markets improve, the City will also look to capture income from the sale of the recyclables as a way to offset some of the costs of collection and processing.

And this is at an 11% recycling rate in Chicago, so there continues to be opportunity to grow the benefits of this program through continuing education and awareness.

Underlying all that needs to be done is engaging individuals in ways that help increase their participation in — and understanding of — recycling...wherever they may live.

One of the signature programs we have undertaken, in partnership with our long-time partners at the Ad Council, is to develop a national public service advertising and awareness campaign on recycling.

It's called "I Want To Be Recycled."

Research conducted as part of the development of the campaign was clear: Americans want to recycle.

Approximately two-thirds of respondents said recycling is a very or extremely important issue, citing its potential positive impact on the economy, public health, the environment, and waste reduction, among other benefits.

In addition to making recycling convenient, two other factors guide Keep America Beautiful's work to increase recycling: communication and cause. And by "cause," we mean giving people a reason to care enough to take action. It is one thing to educate, but we also need to motivate people to act.

That is why we developed the national PSA campaign — the only campaign of its kind aimed at helping to increase proper recycling in America.

"I Want To Be Recycled" targets sporadic recyclers with the goal of turning them into avid recyclers — making recycling a daily social norm.

When talking with consumers about the barriers and solutions to recycling, the most motivating concept was what a product could become — that "next life," if you will — when it is recycled.

The metal food container becomes a bicycle; the plastic bottle becomes a park bench.

In other words, when you recycle, you can "Give your garbage another life."

I'd like to share one of the ads with you now.

### [SHOW JOURNEY PSA]

This is one of two PSA spots from the first phase of our campaign, which was launched in the summer of 2013.

The second phase of creative, which launched earlier this year, takes the message of recycling beyond the kitchen and into the bathroom.

Research shows that a very small percentage of Americans recycle personal care products used in the bathroom, so we know there is much more opportunity here as well.

With that, here is one of the new ads from the campaign:

### [SHOW HERO PSA]

We are thrilled to have received more than \$105 million in donated media to date for this multi-media campaign – ranking “I Want To Be Recycled” among the Ad Council’s top-performing PSA campaigns —and we look forward to growing its reach and impact as we prepare for a new creative phase to be developed in 2016.

I encourage you to learn more about the campaign by visiting [www.IWantToBeRecycled.org](http://www.IWantToBeRecycled.org).

In closing, it’s important to reiterate that one of Keep America Beautiful’s three main objectives is to *increase recycling in America*.

Convenience must be accompanied by clear communications that help educate and emotionally engage individuals to recycle more of the right things the right way.

In doing so we can help make recycling more economically viable, creating jobs and providing a higher quality stream of recyclables to manufacture new products and packaging, while continuing to reap greater environmental and community benefits.

As I indicated, America Recycles Day was this past Sunday, but if we are going to Keep America Beautiful, we know the focus on recycling must continue 365 days per year.

This year’s America Recycles Day theme was “Bathroom, Bags, and Gadgets.”

I encourage each of you to think about recycling items from your bathroom like shampoo bottles and soap boxes; plastic bags and plastic wrap from products like your newspaper and paper towels; and don’t forget some of those obsolete “gadgets” that may be stored in the kitchen drawer or your basement.

Note that the plastic film — bags and wrap — as well as electronics, are easily recyclable. You just need to find a retailer near you. Please visit [AmericaRecyclesDay.org](http://AmericaRecyclesDay.org) to find out more of what can be recycled in your community.

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you the importance of recycling.

Robin and I welcome your questions and comments.

Thank you again.

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