

ISRI's Position on Minimum Recycled Plastic Content Legislation¹

Purpose

This statement provides ISRI's position on the use of recycled plastics in the manufacture of new products, and on minimum mandates for recycled plastics in certain products imposed through legislation for the purpose of strengthening end markets for plastics derived from end-of-life consumer products. This position is specific to plastics only.

Overview

Plastics are an incredibly diverse, versatile group of materials that are used in nearly all aspects of daily life, from life-saving medical supplies to light-weight food packaging. Despite the benefits plastics offer, many people in the United States are concerned about high levels of used plastic entering the natural environment. Using recycled plastic as a feedstock to manufacture new products is an environmentally responsible activity that also strengthens the economy by creating jobs and investment opportunities.

Plastics recyclers process material from commercial, industrial, institutional, and residential sources. While all four are important sources of material, they each have very different market dynamics. The markets for plastics sourced from industrial operations that were generated during a manufacturing process as a byproduct are strong, with supply and demand generally balanced. This plastic is generally homogeneous and "clean" and more easily recycled. All of this results in its desirability to be used as feedstock in the manufacturing supply chain. The market for these plastics – referred to by many as "pre-consumer" plastics - does not require intervention in the form of government mandates or policies to support them.

In contrast, the recycling of plastics from end-of-life consumer products -- whether collected through the residential recycling system or from businesses, commercial operations, institutions, or industrial facilities - are subject to unique pressures that tend to result in a growing supply of material without corresponding well-established end markets. These pressures include: an ever changing and heterogeneous mix of materials flowing into the recycling stream whether there are end markets for these materials or not; "green" commitments on the parts of brands and consumer products manufacturers; "wishcycling"; and expectations by the general public for expanded plastics recycling.

ISRI supports:

- Legislation that expands the use of recycled plastic from residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial sources in applications that are appropriate, noting these levels will vary by application and type of plastic;
- Legislation that focuses on measuring recycled content using only post-consumer plastics (as defined below), provided that such limitations are not applied to any other commodity materials;
- Efforts by manufacturers and brand owners to increase the use of recycled plastic resin beyond legislated levels and applications, when possible;
- Manufacturers incorporating the principles of Design for Recycling® (DfR) to ensure their products are more easily recycled;

¹ As adopted by the ISRI Board of Directors on July 14, 2022.

- Stakeholder efforts that seek to increase plastic recycling through public education, outreach, and advocacy to meet growing demand for recycled plastic;
- Efforts that consider the life cycle assessment of a plastic product to help manufacturers make informed choices on the inclusion of recycled plastic resin: and
- For the purposes of verification and measurement, there may be up to a possible 10% variation in post-consumer plastics resulting in limited non-PCR contamination.

Such efforts will help spur the demand for recycled plastics while also increasing the commitment by stakeholders throughout the supply chain to ensure plastics are responsibly manufactured, collected, and recycled into new products.

Applicable Definitions

Consumer: Individuals, Households, Commercial, Industrial, and/or Institutional facilities in their role as end-users.

Pre-Consumer Plastic

"Pre-Consumer Plastic" is plastic resin material that resulted from a manufacturing process as a byproduct that was collected for the purpose of recycling separate from the process that generated it, rather than being reclaimed within the same process.

Post-Consumer Plastic

"Post-Consumer Plastic" is plastic resin material that has completed its life as a consumer item, having served its intended end use, and has been collected for the purpose of recycling.