



***2016 State of Recycling Address  
Delivered by Robin K. Wiener, President, ISRI  
November 15, 2016***

Good afternoon. It is wonderful to be here with you today, on America Recycles Day, and I am grateful to the Senate Recycling Caucus for inviting ISRI to address the “State of Recycling” during this important briefing. And let me start by thanking Caucus Chairs Senators Boozman and Carper for not only hosting today’s event, but for their long-standing leadership on recycling.

For those of you who are not familiar with ISRI, we are the Voice of the Recycling Industry, representing 1,300 private, for-profit recycling companies in the U.S. and across the globe that process, broker, and consume the entire range of recyclable commodities, including metals, paper, plastics, glass, textiles, rubber, and electronics. Our members are located in every state in the country and range in size from small family-owned businesses to large multinational corporations. ISRI promotes safe, economically sustainable and environmentally responsible recycling through networking, advocacy, and education.

So what is the state of the recycling industry today?

Well, despite difficult market conditions that our industry finds itself faced with due to slow economic growth at home and abroad, recycling remains a vibrant activity and the 1<sup>st</sup> link in the global manufacturing supply chain, supplying nearly 50 percent of the world’s raw materials needs while providing unmistakable economic and environmental benefits in our local communities, across the country, and throughout the globe.

The recycling industry has long been recognized as one of the world’s first green industries, born out of the need to recover and conserve valuable resources. From the earliest of times, people recognized the intrinsic value of recycling and the benefits associated with using and re-using existing materials to create new products. Today, the U.S. scrap recycling industry is a \$100 billion industry dedicated to transforming materials to create new products and driving economies by making the old, new again. Last year alone the recycling industry transformed more than 130 million metric tons of obsolete materials from consumers, businesses, residential sources, and manufacturers throughout the U.S. into specification grade commodities for purchase by industrial consumers. Those commodities included:

- 67 million metric tons of iron and steel;
- 47.2 million metric tons of paper;
- More than 8 million metric tons of aluminum, copper, and other nonferrous metals;
- More than 5 million tons of electronics;
- More than 3.5 million tons of plastic scrap; and
- More than 122 million scrap tires.

Notice I use the word “commodities” when describing the materials the recycling industry processes and produces. This is because recyclable materials are commodities— they are not waste. They are highly valuable and tradeable products, produced according to globally recognized specifications for purchase by industrial consumers around the world – including steel mills, metal refiners, plastic manufacturers, foundries, and paper mills – to meet their raw material needs. Recycled materials are routinely used in place of virgin commodities since they are often less expensive, of comparable – if not better – quality, and save energy which are all important factors in the manufacturing process.

The numbers tell the story...

- Today in the U.S., steelmakers rely on iron and steel scrap – processed from items as diverse as automobiles, household appliances, demolished bridges, and old machinery – for producing roughly two-thirds of all the steel produced in the country every year;
- More than half of the paper industry’s needs here in the U.S. are met today through the use of recovered fiber produced from such items as old newspapers, magazines, catalogs, office paper, and used corrugated boxes.

As one can imagine based on these examples – and there are many more such examples – recycling is an important economic engine and job creator, and the economic benefits generated by the industry are widespread. An independent study conducted last year by John Dunham and Associates shows that the scrap recycling industry directly employs more than 149,000 people in the United States, with an additional 323,000 Americans supported by the activities of the recycling industry. These are real people with real jobs, making an average of \$77,000 in wages and benefits and generating more than \$11 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenues annually.

Recycling offers real solutions for balancing economic growth and environmental stewardship. By protecting the earth’s air, water, and land, recycling gives us a means to minimize our impact on the planet and directly contribute to our quality of life.

For example, using recycled rubber from scrap tires to construct roads has both significant safety and environment benefits. Roads constructed with rubberized asphalt last longer, provides more traction – which is especially important during rainy and icy weather conditions, and are quieter, thus reducing the need for other sound absorbing or blocking structures such as walls and similar noise barriers. Senators Carper and Vitter have been at the forefront of efforts to promote asphalt alternatives and we greatly appreciate their support and leadership on this issue.

Another key area of growth for the recycling industry is plastics recycling. Plastics are all around us, from the beverage container we drink out of, to the dashboard in our car, to the clothes on our back. Our modern society would be lost without the performance and utility that plastics provides. What many do not realize is that these very same plastics are increasingly being recycled and processed into new products and put back into commerce. Plastics recycling is the fastest growing segment of the recycling industry, with more than 3.5 million tons of post-industrial and post-consumer plastics scrap recycled in the U.S. last year. According to a joint report issued by the Association of Plastic Recyclers and the American Chemistry Council, collection of post-consumer plastic bottles has grown from under 500 million pounds in the late ‘90s to just shy of 3 billion pounds in 2015!

Post-industrial plastic scrap such as PVC from building and construction debris, pallet and film stretch wrap used to package goods for transport, and engineered plastics from electronics are increasingly finding their way into the commodity stream, with recyclers making significant investments in capital

and technology to capture these materials. As recyclers bring more of this material to market, we expect to see a dramatic jump in the plastics recycling rate in the future.

ISRI is working with other stakeholders in the recycling chain to overcome any challenges new materials may pose so they can be integrated into the overall recycling stream. For example, earlier this month, ISRI approved a comprehensive set of post-consumer plastic scrap specifications that will help to ensure new materials are recycled and added to an already diverse array of materials that plastic recyclers handle.

I started my remarks this afternoon by highlighting the difficult market conditions that have existed for recycling for the last several years, which has made this an extremely challenging time for many in the industry.

Why are the recycling markets so difficult today?

It is important to understand that the health of the recycling industry is closely related to the health of the global economy, and thus sensitive to the state of both domestic and overseas manufacturing, as well as fluctuations in currency markets, the flow of imports, and of course, volatility in commodity prices. It is no wonder then that the scrap market is cyclical in nature.

When I first began working at ISRI more than 25 years ago, I was told that Alan Greenspan, who was then Chairman of the Federal Reserve, monitored scrap prices as an indicator of the direction of the economy. That relationship continues to hold true today, and I would argue that we are even more tied to the state of the global economy today than we were 25 years ago.

But as with all down cycles, this one is coming to an end, leaving recyclers in an even better position to benefit our economy and society in the months and years ahead. In fact, our industry's response to today's challenging market conditions has resulted in additional improvements to our operational efficiency and quality, along with a renewed commitment to safety. And in an industry whose facilities utilize heavy equipment, worker safety has long been a concern and a top priority for ISRI and our members, which is why ISRI signed an alliance agreement last year with OSHA to work together on industry-wide safety education and awareness efforts.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to highlight one other issue – and that is the role we all have to play in encouraging the next generation of recyclers. This is an issue that is close to my heart as the mother of two young girls who not only believes strongly in the importance of recycling, but who also believes in the importance of the availability of education programs to encourage and foster interest in the sciences, technology, and math. I am therefore very proud that ISRI is playing an active role through the distribution of a K through 12 school curriculum, designed to connect the science of recycling to the act of recycling. Personally, I can't think of a better way to influence the next generation of lawmakers, journalists, manufacturers, and global citizens than through a conversation starting at the schools. I hope you will join us in this effort.

Thank you.

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America Recycles Day

A KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL INITIATIVE

**KEEP AMERICA  
BEAUTIFUL**

**Remarks from Brenda Pulley**  
**Senior Vice President/Recycling, Keep America Beautiful**  
**America Recycles Day Congressional Staff Briefing**  
**Nov. 15, 2016**

Thank you, Robin.

Hello and thank you to Senator Carper and Senator Boozman.

It is a pleasure to be here, and I join Robin in thanking you for your leadership to improve recycling in America.

Since 1953, Keep America Beautiful has worked to fulfill a vision of a country where every community is a clean, green and beautiful place to live.

Our mission is to inspire and educate people to take action every day to improve and beautify their community environment.

Our work is driven by the tireless passion of more than 620 state and community-based Keep America Beautiful affiliates, as well as state recycling organizations, business partners, government entities, and millions of volunteers.

We have three main goals: We seek to End Littering, Improve Recycling and Beautify America's Communities.

Today is America Recycles Day – a national initiative of Keep America Beautiful and one of our signature programs. It is the nationally-recognized day dedicated to raising awareness and celebrating recycling in the United States.

In its 19<sup>th</sup> year, we're very proud that ISRI members and many other partners from across the country – such as community recycling coordinators, teachers, workplace green team leaders and other passionate advocates – host events and promote recycling locally through a variety of means.

Through experiential education, America Recycles Day events nationwide help get people to better understand the “how, what, where and why” of recycling and to encourage them to recycle more, and also better at home, at work, at school, and on-the-go.

Keep America Beautiful conducts a number of national programs beyond America Recycles Day to raise awareness about the benefits of recycling.

In our effort to educate and motivate potential recyclers at all stages of life, we conduct school-based programs such as Recycle-Bowl and collegiate programs such as RecycleMania. Keep America Beautiful also offers public space recycling bin grant programs with corporate partners to make recycling more convenient and accessible.

It’s incumbent upon us to reduce existing challenges or barriers to recycling to make it even more successful. This is why it’s so important that Keep America Beautiful work hand-in-hand with industry partners and experts, such as ISRI.

While Robin provided an overview of the recycling markets and the many economic benefits of recycling, I would also note that EPA today released its Sustainable Materials Management Fact Sheet on the 2014 recycling rate – which is up slightly to 34.6 percent – as well as a new economic report providing information on wages and tax revenues generated from the municipal recycling sector.

While many factors play a role in making recycling successful, at Keep America Beautiful we are focused on how to most effectively educate, motivate and activate individuals to recycle more and more of the right things. Considering the current state of recycling, this is more critical than ever.

Research conducted in partnership with the Ad Council in the development of our ‘I Want To Be Recycled’ public service advertising and awareness campaign reinforced that Americans indeed do want to recycle.

Approximately two-thirds of respondents said recycling is a very/extremely important issue. However, when asked about frequency of recycling, nearly two in three Americans indicate they do not recycle regularly.

An additional study that we just conducted and released this morning indicates that consumers are skeptical about what happens to their recyclables.

Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that they are “skeptical that the recycling they put on the curb actually gets recycled.” Moreover, millennials surveyed had a higher degree of skepticism.

The skepticism consumers feel about recycling underscores the importance of Keep America Beautiful – and collectively all of us – to better educate consumers about recycling.

Rather than trying to get non-recyclers to completely change their behaviors, we are focusing on trying to motivate “occasional” recyclers to do just a little more – helping to turn recycling into a daily social norm.

The research we conducted with the Ad Council indicates that a consistent, emotional message around what products can become will help motivate consumers to take that small step for big change, meeting a big need.

The “I Want To Be Recycled” PSA campaign creatively moves people to see that an individual can “Give Your Garbage Another Life” by recycling.

When talking with consumers about the barriers and solutions to recycling, the most motivating concept was that a product or its packaging didn’t have to be waste; but indeed what it could become – that “next life,” if you will – when it is recycled.

I would just note that based on our updated research released today, those key concepts remain among the prominent reasons as to why people indicate they recycle – to reduce the amount of waste going into landfills, and to conserve resources by having materials be recycled into new products.

That soup can becomes a bike ... a plastic water bottle becomes a park bench ... and that shampoo bottle becomes a new hairbrush. You’ll get to hear one example of those new products in just a few seconds.

We launched the first phase of the campaign with two PSAs. Here is one of those PSAs, which we call “Journey.”

[SHOW JOURNEY - :60 PSA]

The second phase of creative took the message of recycling beyond the kitchen and into the bathroom. With that, here is one of the ads from the second phase of the campaign.

[SHOW HERO - :30 PSA]

We are thrilled to have received more than \$150 million in donated media to date for this multi-media campaign. The campaign has also driven 4 million individuals to the campaign website to learn more. And while it ranks among the Ad Council’s top-performing PSA campaigns, we look forward to growing its reach and impact in 2017.

So as an industry, part of our challenge is to make recycling an easy act to take. Bottom line: Making recycling convenient is paramount for people to participate in the behavior of recycling. Further, access to recycling must be accompanied by clear communications that educate, but also emotionally engage individuals to recycle more of the right things the right way.

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Frankly, plastics recycling serves as one example of some of the challenges – not all plastics generated are currently recyclable.

The good news is that innovation to develop markets for plastics continues. As Robin indicated, the industry has been and continues to work to unify and simplify how to communicate which plastics to recycle. This is critical to continue to help get that “cleaner stream.” Based on our recent survey, 67 percent responded that if an item is plastic, they put it in the recycling bin.

Join us in helping to make recycling more economically viable, creating jobs and providing a higher quality stream of recyclables to manufacture new products, while continuing to reap greater environmental and community benefits.

This year’s America Recycles Day call-to-action, “#BeRecycled,” is an invitation to individuals to actively live a recycled lifestyle. We encourage everyone to commit to the “Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.” mantra in every aspect of their lives. Participate in the act of recycling. And buy products made from recycled content.

We believe that recycling is essential to keeping America beautiful.

Please visit [AmericaRecyclesDay.org](http://AmericaRecyclesDay.org) to find out more of what can be recycled in your community. While you’re there, take the #BeRecycled Pledge!

Please – let’s Keep America Beautiful. Recycle!

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

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