

As You Sow Leans on Beverage Giants to Improve Recycling

By Robert Kropp, SocialFunds.com at Greener World Media

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According to a 2005 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is defined as "an environmental policy approach under which the responsibility of producers for their products is extended to include the social costs of waste management, including the environmental impact of waste disposal."

Noting that EPR "has been successfully adopted in Canada and Europe, diverting large amounts of plastic, glass, metal, and paper away from landfills into recycling streams that conserve resources," As You Sow has engaged with several major U.S.-based consumer products companies, successfully encouraging several to adopt policies "to recycle a majority of bottles and cans sold over the next six to eight years," according to the organization.

Recent studies have concluded that products and packaging are responsible for 44 percent of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the U.S., and the three major bottlers with which As You Sow has successfully engaged thus far -- Coca Cola, Nestle Waters, and PepsiCo -- have acknowledged that their bottles and packaging contribute significantly to their carbon footprints. Nestle, in fact, estimates the impact at 55 percent.

As a result of As You Sow's engagement, Nestle has committed to recycling 60 percent of beverage industry polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles by 2018. Coca-Cola will recycle 50 percent of PET plastic, glass bottles, and cans sold by 2015, and PepsiCo will recycle 50 percent of its PET plastic, glass bottles, and cans sold by 2018.

As You Sow is expanding its engagement to pressure "key consumer product companies like General Mills, Kraft Foods, Procter & Gamble, and Unilever to take responsibility for collection and recycling of their packaging."

"Increased recycling of packaging will yield strong environmental benefits, leading to more efficient use of materials, reduced extraction of natural resources, and lower GHG emissions," As You Sow continued. "EPR policies will create new markets for packaging materials that currently have little value."

In an email to SocialFunds.com, Conrad MacKerron, senior program director for the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Program at As You Sow, stated, "About 40 million tons of consumer product packaging is needlessly landfilled or burned in the U.S. each year. We can no longer afford to discard packaging as resource experts tell us we are already overshooting Earth's ecological limits."

"We're also throwing away potential revenue," MacKerron continued. "The commodity market value of wasted glass, plastic, paper, and metal packaging is estimated at between \$15 billion and \$23 billion."