

# Report: Beverage makers sip sustainability strategy

By Heather Clancy | August 15, 2011, 4:02 AM PDT

Shareholder advocacy group **As You Sow** has released its third report about recycling policies in the beverage industry since 2006, and its major theme is this: more industry players are taking action and would support extended producer responsibility (EPR) initiatives in the United States.

Still, the report, “Waste & Opportunity: U.S. Beverage Container Recycling Scorecard and Report,” seems to suggest that none of the major beverage companies are doing an excellent job with both reducing packaging and using recycled materials. No one got an “A” grade; the highest rating was a B-. As you Sow looks at the following to formulate its ratings:

1. Source materials reduction
2. Efforts to create product packaging
3. Increases in container recovery rates

The three leaders, which wasn’t really a surprise to me, based on what I have been reading about their activities, are:

- Nestle Waters North America
- PepsiCo
- The Coca-Cola Co.

Overall, PepsiCo does the best job of using recycled content, 10 percent across its entire product line. But Nestle Waters got a slightly higher score in the report because it manages to collect more of its packaging. Coca-Cola got somewhat dinged in the ratings because it blew its goal to use 10 percent of recycled PET in its product lines by the end of 201, according to the report.

Right now, of the 224 billion beverage containers that are sold in the United States each year, only 29 percent (by weight) are recycled, according to **As You Sow**. Here are the goals of the top three companies in the report: Nestle Waters has said it will recycle 60 percent of its PET bottles by 2018; PepsiCo seeks to recycle 50 percent of its plastic, glass bottles and cans by the same year; and Coca-Cola aims to recycle 50 percent of its PET plastic, glass bottles and cans sold by 2015.

Said Amy Galland, the organization’s research director and the author of the report:

“Several leading beverage companies continue to make steady incremental progress on source reduction but have not demonstrated strong commitment to using recycled content — a significant driver in reducing the environmental impact of packaging.”

One of the things that struck me as I was looking through some of the report’s charts was just how many companies didn’t bother to respond to **As You Sow’s** request for information. In particular, the major beer brewers, while many of them are working hard on water conservation, haven’t worked quite as hard on the packaging aspect of their responsibility. An exception was New Belgium Brewing Co., which is using the highest reported amount of recycled glass (50 percent), in its 22-ounce bottles. (One of the New Belgium microbrew labels you might know is Fat Tire.)