

Beverage Industry Recycling Gets a Report Card for 2011

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A close examination of the U.S. beverage industry's collective efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle reveals many divergent trends.

For the third year, advocacy organization **As You Sow's** beverage recycling survey graded leading companies on their efforts toward packaging sustainability. The *Waste & Opportunity: U.S. Beverage Container Recycling Scorecard and Report* also found several brands, including Coca-Cola and Nestlé Waters, would support the advancement of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation. Such laws could entail increased financial responsibility on the part of manufacturers for the collection and recycling of post-consumer beverage packaging. This represents a new stance from leading

companies, one that could prove significant if change is to occur.

In Canada and Europe, where EPR laws are already in place, beverage containers are recovered at a much higher rate than the estimated 29% by container weight achieved in the United States. The rest are either land-filled or incinerated. The report indicates a direct link between container recovery rates and the ability of manufacturers to incorporate recycled content, like polyethylene terephthalate (PET), into new bottles. "We note that several companies said they couldn't make solid commitments to close the loop faster because they were having trouble getting adequate supplies of post-consumer PET," says Conrad MacKerron, senior program director for **As You Sow's** Corporate Social Responsibility Program. The best option for increasing recovery rates is more consumer deposit laws, according to MacKerron. But beverage companies are opposed to this solution, leaving any increased responsibility with the companies themselves in the form of EPR legislation.

Numbered scores given to individual companies are based on the information they provided in the survey. Companies that were invited but did not respond were graded based upon public information. Each company was also assigned an overall letter grade, with the highest awarded being a B-. A recurring theme was that while progress has been made by some companies in reducing source material, no substantial commitments are being made to use recycled content in future packaging.

Based upon its findings, the report makes several recommendations on how the beverage industry should proceed. An emphasis on coordinating with other stakeholders, including other consumer packaging industries and retailers that produce private label lines, is necessary to move toward EPR legislation and related policy goals. "It has already started to occur with an effort led by Nestlé Waters North America to get beverage companies, grocers like Whole Foods and (Consumer Packaged Goods manufacturers) to work together to seriously engage on this issue and develop an EPR program model for packaging that could be supported by these industry sectors as state-based legislation," says MacKerron. The report also stated that major brewing companies, including Anheuser Busch and MillerCoors, need to set more aggressive recycling goals and increase disclosure of their practices and sustainability efforts.

Whole Foods Market was one of the companies whose main business is not beverages that responded to the **As You Sow** survey. The grocer has a stated goal of using 35% recycled content in its 20-oz. PET and 12-oz. HDPE bottles for 2011, with a future goal of 75%.

Other key findings and a download of the report can be accessed at http://asyousow.org/sustainability/bev_survey.shtml.