

# Plastic Recycling Subcommittee

## Rigid Plastics Proposals

### **Background**

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According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) 2012 Plastics Report, the industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) sector is the largest generator of plastic waste in Wisconsin, accounting for 65% of the plastics waste stream with an estimated value of \$42 million. The ICI sector comprises 61% (63,000 tons) of the total rigid plastics disposed of in Wisconsin per year.

There is no state requirement for ICI sector facilities to report recyclables collected, therefore little data is available on how much plastic is recycled currently by the ICI sector. Aside from the many barriers to collecting rigid plastics for recycling, low bale quality of collected plastics can be a significant issue for end markets. These markets often have difficulty absorbing costs of handling contaminants included in mixed rigid bales.

The following recommendations were devised to address the challenges and opportunities associated with rigid plastic recycling including:

- Understanding the specific sectors, materials and volumes of rigid plastics
- Assist Material Recovery Facilities (MRF) to determine the scale, scope and potential economic advantages of improving bale quality
- Expand partnerships and education opportunities between public and private sectors

### **Broad Scope/Large Scale Proposals**

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- 1. Contract a professional study and report, targeting the major generation sources and recovery opportunities for non-bottle rigid plastics in Wisconsin's ICI Sector.** Identify where efforts and resources should be targeted to gain the greatest economic returns and environmental benefits. This could be a joint bid with a consulting company along with a trade association or other partner. The American Chemistry Council and other trade associations are potential funding sources for this project. Specifically, this study would:
  - Identify small, medium and large sector generators and distribution centers in Wisconsin (i.e. retail, fast food, grocery, etc.)
  - Identify materials and volumes generated in the waste stream
  - Map the flow of commercial material to gain a better understanding of:
    - How each material moves through different sectors
    - How much material could be recovered
    - What are the barriers to greater recovery
  - Recommend specific actions that would increase rigid plastic recovery and develop markets for recovered material
- 2. Support the Association of Postconsumer Plastics Recyclers' (APR) initiatives to improve bale quality.** Improvements in bale quality will increase demand for and value of recycled rigid plastics both in Wisconsin and outside markets.

- **“Sort Plastics For Value”** – APR on-line decision-making tool to assist MRFs in determining the best mix of plastic bales for different markets and market conditions (coming in fall 2013).
- **“Model Bale Specifications”** – APR initiative, in conjunction with ReTrac, to encourage consistent terminology for all types of recyclable plastics.
- **Proposed Actions:**
  - Education and outreach targeting MRF owners and operators, recycling responsible units and others involved in the collection/processing of rigid and other plastics via webinars, presentations at workshops or conferences, and mentoring opportunities. The WDNR could lead, in collaboration with UW-Extension and trade associations.

### **3. Support APR “Recycle Grocer Rigid Plastics” project**

- Work with trade associations to obtain baseline data on location, types and amounts of material generated and current disposal options
- Identify potential markets, capacity and needs
- Consider entering in to a memorandum of understanding similar with the WDNR memorandum of understanding for Flexible Film
  - Explore option with Wisconsin grocers and Grocer Association
  - Scale back the National model to fit regionally within Wisconsin

## **Additional Recommendations**

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- A.** Based on previously noted professional study (See 1, above), the WDNR, in cooperation with WI Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), release a Request for Expression of Interest regarding rigid plastics recycling (use this as a platform to obtain more information of needs and opportunities).
  - WEDC to help identify sectors that would be interested in recycling of rigid plastics
- B.** Form a Wisconsin Plastics Recycling Corporation, which would open up opportunities for funding through WEDC.
  - Partner with existing organizations and encourage Wisconsin companies to join
- C.** Promote, enhance, utilize and distribute existing materials on recycling markets (could be done through the Wisconsin Plastics Recycling Corporation, UW-Extension, UW-Extension’s Solid & Hazardous Waste Education Center, WDNR).
  - Create and fund a business assistance program to facilitate increased recovery, reuse, and recycling of plastic waste materials from the ICI sector in Wisconsin.
    - The program should be free to join, confidential, and non-regulatory.
    - It would assist waste generators in the implementation of waste reduction/recycling measures and also assist Wisconsin recycling markets in sourcing more feedstock material.
    - Potentially funded through WEDC and administered through UW-Extension’s Solid & Hazardous Waste Education Center.
- D.** Request or require reporting of ICI Sector materials to WDNR to increase understanding of challenges and opportunities for recycling
- E.** Revisit opportunities to increase collection and recycling of residential plastics after rigid plastics’ initiatives have been launched successfully.
  - Encourage collection of more types of plastics