

@naturepl.com / Jordi Chias / WWF

ELEMENTS OF AN EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY FRAMEWORK

RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON EPR






WHY EPR IS AN EFFECTIVE SOLUTION

Plastic waste is polluting the air, water, and soil that people and wildlife need to survive. The waste management system and recycling infrastructure in the United States is not able to handle the amount of plastic being discarded each day, leading to environmental, economic, and health issues. Establishing a national Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policy is one of the most effective ways to address this growing challenge.


With EPR, producers of plastic packaging are financially responsible for the entire life cycle of their materials. It can ensure that all sectors—public, private, and civil society—come together to solve this collective problem. EPR is a whole-of-society approach that increases public access to recycling and reuse infrastructure, incentivizes the use of more sustainable packaging, and reduces plastic production and pollution. Several states have already enacted EPR policies or are considering legislation to do so at the state level.

A national Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system would benefit both consumers and producers while reducing plastic pollution. An effective system would:

- Increase funding for recycling programs.
- Incentivize producers to use recyclable, reusable, or compostable packaging instead of single-use or virgin plastic.
- Result in product redesign to limit the amount of problematic plastics used in packaging.
- Expand consumer access to recycling programs, particularly in underserved communities.
- Reduce the amount of waste going into landfills, which also helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Help producers of plastic packaging meet their sustainability targets.
- Create new economic opportunities for the private sector and local communities

11 MILLION METRIC TONS 
The amount of plastic that enters the ocean every year—this is equivalent to over one dump truck of plastic entering the oceans every minute.

\$11.5 BILLION 
The amount the United States spends on cleanup from trash leakage into the environment.

9% 
The percentage of plastic recycled in the U.S. each year.



DRIVING FOR CONSISTENCY WHILE ADAPTING TO DIVERSE STARTING POINTS

As more states and the federal government consider enacting EPR and other related recycling and circular economy policies, it will be imperative to have harmonized definitions for specific key terms to ensure consistency across all jurisdictions.

1. PRO System

Recommendation: A single PRO under one EPR program, typically functioning as a non-profit. PRO shares responsibility with municipalities for waste management services for covered materials, by providing service or contracting with public and private service providers – this may be through responsibility for certain services, responsibility only for services beyond existing coverage, and/or collaboration on a per municipality basis. Additionally, a single PRO system may increase the potential for economies of scale due to aggregation of waste and larger feedstock and funding commitments, and can be more effective, results-oriented, and operationally efficient compared to multiple PROs.

2. Operational Responsibility

Recommendation: The PRO shares responsibility with municipalities for waste management services for covered materials, by providing service or contracting with public and private service providers – this may be through responsibility for certain services, responsibility only for services beyond existing coverage, and/or collaboration on a per municipality basis.

3. Program Cost Coverage

Recommendation: Coverage should include:

- Administration of the PRO, processing programs, program enforcement, etc.
- Development of accessible educational resources and campaigns in systems across varying consumer demographics and needs.
- Investments in new infrastructure, which may include equipment or facilities for reuse, recycling, and composting.
- Development of markets to ensure that covered products collected for processing reach responsible end markets.

4. Financial Responsibility

Recommendation: Full financial responsibility from producers is highly preferred, however, shared responsibility is an acceptable compromise, when producers are responsible for 90% or more of the program. Financial responsibility split can change over time, and some programs phase this split gradually to increase the PRO's financial responsibility after start-up costs, as the waste management system matures.

5. Fee Structure

Recommendation: Eco-modulation, where fees include a bonus or malus based on sustainability, reuse, and recyclability within material categories. Regardless of approach, it will be important to harmonize calculation methodologies and categories for setting fees across geographies, including eco-modulation approaches to fees.

6. Funding Mechanism

Recommendation: Performance-based, where payments are linked to achieving specific targets, such as collection rates, processing efficiency, and contamination rates. There are potential benefits to this funding mechanism, including supporting innovation and covering all costs.

7. Performance Targets

Recommendation: All performance targets (including, but not limited to, source reduction, reuse, PCR, and rates of return/collection) should be set by the PRO based on the needs assessment. This will ensure a reasonable ability to modify and evolve the targets based on current data availability and economic conditions. PRO target setting decisions should be reviewed by the appropriate government oversight agency to ensure sufficiency.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WWF's Positions on Plastic Pollution

- [**From Waste to Accountability: Designing Impactful Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\) Programs**](#)
- [WWF and ABA Joint Principles for Reducing Materials Footprint and Achieving Circularity](#)
- [The role of reuse in a circular economy for plastics](#)
- [Circular economy for packaging in the United States](#)
- [Chemical recycling implementation principles](#)
- [Biobased and biodegradable plastic](#)
- [Plastic crediting and plastic neutrality](#)

Partner Resources

- [The Recycling Partnership Policy Toolkit](#)
- [Ocean Conservancy Policy Toolkit](#)
- [Closed Loop Partners Policy Brief](#)
- [Upstream Resources](#)



© Shutterstock / STEKLO