

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

September 23, 2022

The Honorable Michael S. Regan  
Administrator  
United States Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Regan:

As work continues on the National Recycling Strategy, we request the Environmental Protection Agency begin implementing standardized recycling bin labels. Given the importance of standardized bin labeling to the success of any federal recycling strategy, we urge you to develop and implement a nationally standardized bin labeling strategy, as called for under Objective C of the National Recycling Strategy.

Our recycling system is broken, and Americans have lost faith in recycling as a waste management solution. As of 2022, 49 percent of Americans believe that the recycling system does not work well, and 30 percent are not confident that what they put into recycling bins actually gets recycled.<sup>1</sup> This lack of faith stems from the culture of confusion surrounding recycling. In fact, 62 percent of Americans worry that a lack of knowledge causes them to recycle incorrectly.<sup>2</sup>

While startling, this number is unsurprising, considering there are millions of different labels on recycling and trash bins today. Consumer confusion surrounding proper waste sorting leads to contaminated waste streams. Contaminated recycling not only yields itself to missed recycling opportunities but also wreaks havoc on recycling centers' operations. Recycling facilities are forced to shut down for numerous hours per day to decontaminate recycling streams, stalling operations and endangering workers who risk their safety to unclog and untangle trash from the machines.

Standardized labels for recycling and trash bins are one way to overcome these challenges. The clear, standardized visuals work like road signs to show people what can be recycled in each bin. These labels can then be customized to suit the capacity of recycling plants in each municipality, educating consumers on what can and cannot go into every individual recycling can. There are now more than 9 million standardized labels on recycling and compost bins across the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Shelton, "Americans love recycling, they have no idea how it works, and they think it might be broken," *Shelton Group*, March 23, 2022, <https://sheltongrp.com/americans-love-recycling-have-no-idea-how-it-works/#:~:text=While%20a%20whopping%2095%25%20of,moving%20in%20the%20wrong%20direction>.

<sup>2</sup> Marie Haaland, "More than half of Americans are confused about recycling," *New York Post*, April 16, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/04/16/more-than-half-of-americans-are-confused-about-recycling/>

Implementation of these standardized labels has already been met with huge economic and environmental success. As part of the Leave No Trace program, standardized recycling labels created by Recycle Across America led to a 100 percent increase in recycling levels in several National Parks, including Yosemite and Grand Teton. Similarly, standardized labels have resulted in the Las Vegas School District saving up to \$6 million in two years due to decreased trash hauling fees, with similar results seen in schools elsewhere. The State of Rhode Island has seen a 20 percent reduction in rejected truckloads after implementing standardized labels.<sup>3</sup>

Now is the time to take concerted action to coordinate our national recycling and optimize our recycling processes. Standardized labels for recycling and trash bins work, a fact that EPA has already recognized by including them in the National Recycling Strategy under Objective C. Yet, strategy execution of this objective is lacking.

We urge you to establish a clear and cohesive standardized bin labeling implementation strategy and begin executing this plan. These actions are effective and necessary to invigorate the circular economy while protecting our environment, climate, and public health.

Sincerely,



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Alan S. Lowenthal  
Member of Congress



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Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



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Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress

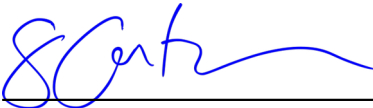


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Lisa Blunt Rochester  
Member of Congress

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<sup>3</sup> “Results,” Recycle Across America, accessed August 5, 2022, <https://www.recycleacrossamerica.org/testimonials>



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Sean Casten  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



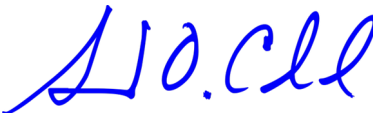
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Katie Porter  
Member of Congress



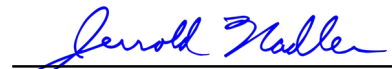
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Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



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Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress



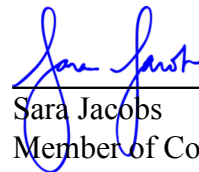
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Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress



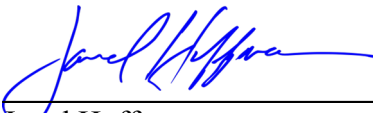
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Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



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Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress



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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



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Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress



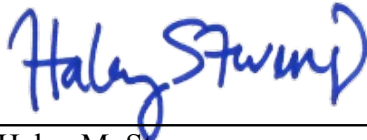
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Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress



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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress



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Haley M. Stevens  
Member of Congress