

Re+ Fast Start Action Overview

Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging & Paper Products

Description

Support adoption of a statewide Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program for packaging and paper products. EPR requires companies that make consumer products to fund the residential recycling system and ensure their packaging and paper products actually get recycled. EPR could save local governments and residents money, increase reuse and recycling rates, and incentivize companies to reduce their packaging and change packaging designs to be reusable, recyclable, or compostable.

Background

In 2019, 91,445 tons of packaging and paper products – about 19% of total residential garbage – were sent to landfill in King County, excluding Seattle. About half of this was cardboard and paper; 40% plastic; and 10% metal and glass. Most of these materials were potentially recyclable and would save money and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, if recycled.

Recycling has become increasingly more challenging for local governments to manage due to a dramatic rise in the quantity and different types of packaging in the waste stream. In 2018, China and other countries restricted the import of recyclable materials from the U.S. These recent changes have made the system more expensive to run, leading to service cuts and/or increased costs for residents.

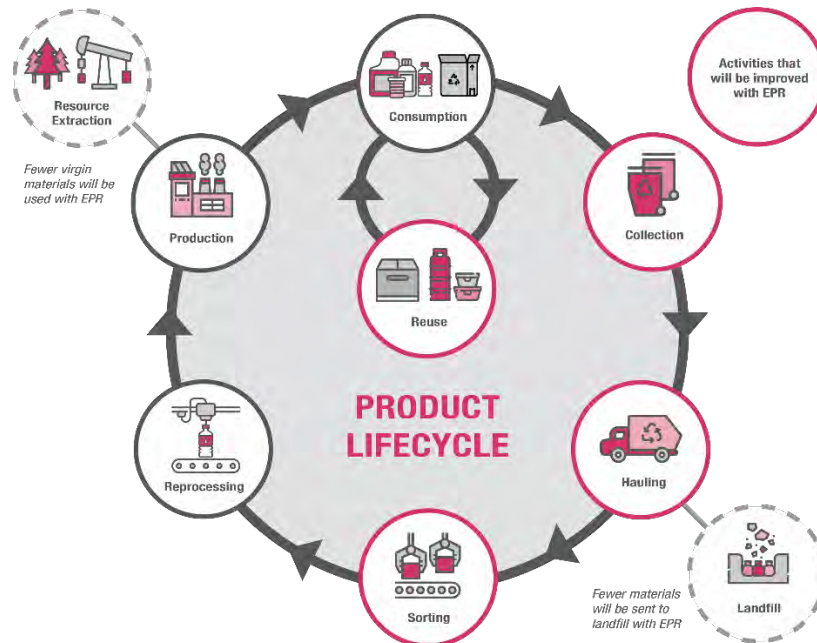


Figure 1. EPR would make companies responsible for the reuse and recycling of their packaging and paper products ensuring that they become new products and materials in a circular economy.



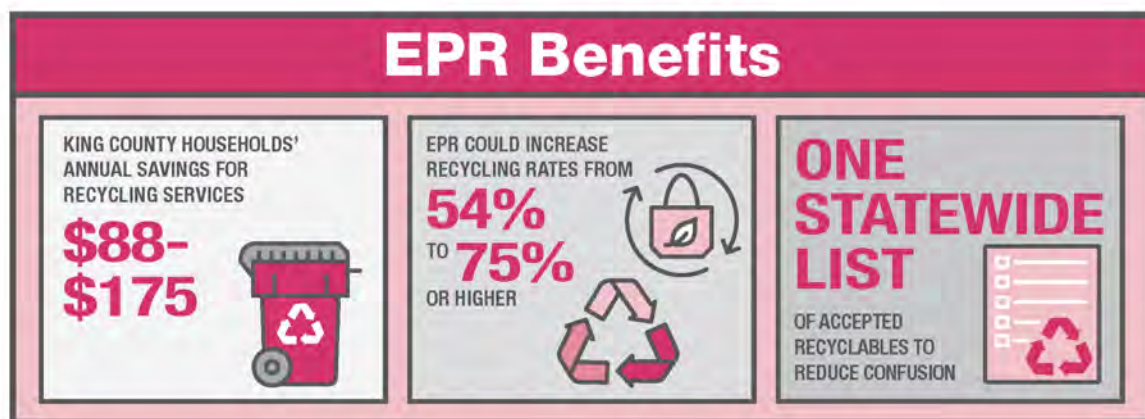
EPR is a proven policy and has been implemented in over 40 jurisdictions around the world. EPR programs can be designed in different ways, but they have all demonstrated they:

1. Typically save local governments and residents money;
2. Create more efficient collection and processing of recyclable materials;
3. Reduce disposal; and,
4. Increase recycling.

They also contribute to the generation of separated, high-quality secondary raw materials supporting the development of recycling markets and creating local, green jobs. Examples of packaging and paper products that could be covered under EPR legislation include:

- Beverage containers, e.g., plastic and glass bottles and aluminum cans
- Milk jugs and cartons
- Cardboard boxes
- All other types of consumer packaging, e.g., glass jars, tin cans, plastic pouches, bubble wrap mailers, polystyrene foam blocks, etc.
- Single-use food service items, e.g., utensils, cups, straws, food containers, etc.
- Newspapers, magazines and junk mail

Benefits



- EPR could increase reuse and recycling rates to 75% or greater, which would divert 25,500 tons or more of material from Cedar Hills Regional Landfill. If this material is recycled, it would correspond to 75,000 (range 64,000 – 86,000) metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent of greenhouse gas emissions saved each year. The statewide benefits would be even greater.
- EPR would provide access to convenient recycling at no additional cost to residents. The annual savings per household in King County are estimated to be up to \$88 to \$175 (based on Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission-regulated rates). King County would be reimbursed for the collection of recyclables from residents at our recycling and transfer stations.
- With EPR, there would be a single statewide list of accepted recyclable items, and recycling education and outreach would be consistent, multi-lingual and culturally relevant across the state, which would reduce confusion and ultimately contamination.
- EPR builds on existing service and infrastructure while investing in improvements. It also provides greater transparency on how materials are recycled responsibly. Under EPR, all



materials must be sent to verified end markets or countries that meet certain environmental, labor, health, and safety standards.

- The increased collection and processing of recyclable material would create an estimated 1,650 new, local, green, living wage jobs in the state.¹

Considerations

Brands and other companies that make consumer products, so-called producers, must fund the entire program including collection, processing, marketing of recycled materials, education, and outreach as well as government oversight and enforcement. This approach incentivizes producers to reduce packaging, innovate and optimize the system to reduce costs. Local governments would maintain authority over recycling services but would align their services for statewide consistency. The Department of Ecology would ensure program oversight and compliance.

Haulers and processors must adapt and work with local governments and producers to expand collection and processing capacity. All partners must work together to find the best way to increase and improve reuse, recycling, and composting.

Equity and Social Justice Considerations

All communities in the state would benefit from convenient access to recycling at no cost. Culturally relevant education and outreach would be provided in appropriate languages. Prior to implementation, consultation would be held with underserved communities and communities that bear disproportionately higher levels of adverse environmental, social justice and economic impacts. Recycling end markets would need to meet certain environmental, labor, and health standards which would ensure materials don't cause negative impacts to communities abroad.

There may be concerns that EPR would increase product prices, but evidence has shown that any additional costs incurred by producers would not be reflected in retail prices paid by consumers.

Next Steps

- 2022: Work with the Northwest Product Stewardship Council and stakeholders in the interim on a policy proposal for the next legislative session.
- 2023: Advocate for passing EPR legislation for PPP that works for local governments and residents.
- 2023 – 2024: The Department of Ecology conducts a needs assessment in consultation with stakeholders.
- 2024 – 2026: Producers conduct a stakeholder consultation before developing a plan for the EPR program.
- 2026: Producers through their Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) submit a plan for how the EPR program for PPP would work.
- 2027: The PRO implements their plan and the EPR Program starts.

Questions?

Email
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¹ Eunomia (2021) Improving Recycling in Washington through Producer Responsibility Policy: Costs and Benefits, December 2021. <https://productstewardship.net/sites/default/files/Docs/packaging/eunomia-report-epr-cost-benefit-2022-01-12.pdf>



Reducing single use items. **Reusing** everything that can be. **Recycling** what's left. **Renewing** communities. **Rethinking** what's possible.