

Overview

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a policy approach that encompasses all environmental expenses linked to product packaging across its life cycle, incorporating them into the market price of the package. EPR itself doesn't change the market price of a package, it instead charges producers for producing the packaging after the fact. Widespread understanding of Extended Producer Responsibility within the world of packaging sustainability has grown substantially over the past two decades. However, what exactly is EPR, and how does it have the potential to help companies in achieving their sustainability objectives? An EPR system is structured to create a funding mechanism to improve and operate curbside recycling and encourage specific stakeholders in the supply chain to utilize easily recyclable materials for their packaging. The system holds obligated companies accountable for the expense of collecting and recycling the packaging waste they introduce into U.S. markets. EPR programs shift waste-management responsibilities that have traditionally been handled by consumers or state and local governments to the producer of the product. With the growing emergence of EPR laws, companies selling products within the U.S. are now increasingly required to plan for the end of a product's life. As a policy mechanism to streamline recycling operations in the U.S., EPR could also ensure consumer access and equity to recycling for all Americans. In this Basic, we will look at what Extended Producer Responsibility is and what the future of EPR looks like across the world.

What is EPR?

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a concept where producers and importers bear the responsibility for collecting and managing the disposal of their product packaging, with the result aiming to promote recycling of all materials and a shift toward more recyclable materials. Examples of these materials that would be considered highly recyclable packages are aluminum and cardboard. The EPR system offers producers and importers an opportunity to establish an ecosystem conducive to a circular economy, distributing the responsibility of managing packaging waste and reallocating public funds that are typically allocated for waste management. While EPR systems vary from country to country, they share common fundamental principles, such as enhancing the recyclability, incentivizing reusability, promoting the use of recycled content in their packaging, and reducing the use of packaging materials. A well-designed EPR strategy needs to clearly outline the types of packaging materials and corresponding EPR fees to be paid by obligated companies—those responsible for placing packaging on the market. In the best EPR systems, eco-modulated fee structures create powerful financial incentives for producers to utilize more eco-friendly packaging formats.

The effectiveness of an EPR system partially hinges on active governmental involvement in regulating the framework to create a conducive environment for EPR, overseeing system operators, and setting collection and recycling targets. Unlike taxes or public fees, existing EPR fees are not collected by public fiscal authorities nor allocated to public budgets. Instead, these fees are collected and managed by a designated system operator and are intended to be solely utilized to finance activities related to packaging waste management.

Center Forward Basics

Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit www.center-forward.org

Goals of EPR

Extended Producer Responsibility programs aim to achieve multiple objectives, including:

- Waste reduction
- Reduced public spending
- Innovative product design

EPR promotes an approach to managing materials whereby products that were previously destined for the landfill are recovered, recycled, and reused to make new products at higher rates. By requiring producers to be responsible for covering recycling costs instead of local governments and taxpayers, increased stability and additional taxpayer funds could be allocated to other services. Furthermore, internalizing the expenses via eco-modulation linked with recycling could incentivize producers to minimize overall costs by establishing a more streamlined system.

In their current form, EPR rules and guidelines seem to be slightly fragmented and have room for improvement. EPR seeks to incentivize producers to design products that have minimal environmental impact throughout their life cycle. This updated process starts with the raw materials and feedstocks used in production and maximum reuse, recycling, and reduction opportunities.

Widespread EPR

Passing a national EPR law in the U.S. poses greater challenges compared to other countries due to our decentralized 50-state system. States, local governments, and municipalities wield significant individual authority, and each state faces its own political obstacles. According to the research done by The Recycling Partnership in Belgium, top recycling rates in 2020 reached 95% despite a global recycling downturn, and an EPR policy drove recycling rates to over 75% in British Columbia, Canada, Belgium, Spain, South Korea, and the Netherlands.

Industry representatives from various sectors of the plastic industry collectively expressed to a federal committee their support on exploring the implementation of federal EPR. In early March of 2024, the Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works convened a hearing on this matter. Conversations covered a range of topics and solutions regarding how the federal government could become involved in EPR, such as with data collection and harmonization.

States that have achieved success in passing EPR laws have engaged stakeholders from various points along the value chain to understand their perspectives and input, in turn crafting legislation tailored to their state's needs. These laws retain elements that align with those enacted by other states, ensuring coherence across jurisdictions. However, states have shown an understanding that if an existing recycling program is in place such as bottle deposit laws, the need to impose an EPR program on those materials is not required. As EPR gains more traction, and more federal activity becomes a possibility, the policies have the potential to gain increased attention.

Links to Other Resources

- American Forest and Paper Association - [What is Extended Producer Responsibility | AF&PA](#)
- Apple - [Environmental Progress Report - Apple](#)
- Environmental Protection Agency - [National Strategy for Electronics Stewardship \(NSES\)](#)
- Guide to EPR - [Extended Producer Responsibility](#)

- National Conference of State Legislatures - [Report Extended Producer Responsibility](#).
- Plastics Recycling Update - [Bills introduced in 2024 focus on EPR bans](#)
- Plastics Recycling Update - [Committee explores federal role in packaging EPR](#)
- The Nickel Report - [Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging: What's Ahead in 2024](#)
- The Recycling Partnership - [Extended Producer Responsibility 101 | Why We Need EPR Policy](#)
- Trayak Sustainability - [What is EPR? Understanding the Basics](#)
- Unitar - [GEM 2020 - E-Waste Monitor](#)
- World Economic Forum - [The world's e-waste is a huge problem. It's also a golden opportunity](#)
- World Wildlife Fund - [What is Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\)? | Blog Posts | WWF](#)
- World Wildlife Fund - [Extended producer responsibility \(epr\) fact sheet](#)