



The Recycling and Composting Accountability Act

Most Americans want to recycle their waste rather than see it end up in nearby landfills or on our lands and in our waters. Yet, with a national recycling rate of only 32%, it is clear we can and must do better. The United States faces no shortage of challenges around our recycling and composting infrastructure. Congress needs to take steps to ensure that we have the information we need to support efforts to move toward sustainability and foster a more circular economy.

The Recycling and Composting Accountability Act (RCAA) is bipartisan legislation that seeks to fill critical information gaps, information that is needed to strengthen America’s recycling and composting infrastructure. Specifically, the bill would:

Identify National Composting Infrastructure Challenges

The RCAA would require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to work with state, local, and Tribal governments to assess the capability of the United States to implement a national residential composting strategy. The bill then directs EPA to issue a report identifying potential barriers to such a strategy and evaluating existing composting programs across the country.

Improve Recycling Data Measurement and Reporting

The RCAA would create a comprehensive baseline of data on the U.S. recycling system by requiring EPA to collect and report on the:

- Prevalence of recycling and composting programs nationwide.
- Types of materials accepted by each program.
- Contamination rates in each program.
- Community access to curbside or drop off recycling and composting services.



Additionally, the legislation would require EPA to prepare an inventory of the number of materials recovery facilities (MRF) across the country and a description of the materials that each facility can process. It would also allow the agency to collect data on the rate of recyclable materials that states successfully divert from waste streams and bring to MRFs or composting facilities and provide technical assistance to states seeking to improve recycling and composting rates.

Assess End Markets and Diversion

The RCAA would direct EPA to prepare a report on the end market sale of all recyclable materials and compostable materials collected from households and publicly available drop-off centers. It also instructs the agency to develop a metric for examining the proportion of recyclable materials in commercial and municipal waste streams that are being diverted from a circular market through elimination or disposal.

Establish Recycling and Composting Best Practices:

Using improved data collection and reporting, the RCAA would establish voluntary guidelines for state, local, and Tribal governments to enhance recycling and composting efforts. This would include:

- Standardized labeling techniques for containers of waste, recycling, and compostable materials.
- Readily available pamphlets and other print materials on recycling.
- Primary and secondary school educational resources.
- Web and media-based education campaigns.
- Labeling guidance for recyclable and compostable materials.



Evaluate Federal Recycling Practices

The RCAA asks the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to examine the recycling practices across the federal government and issue a report that documents the annual recycling rates of federal agencies. The Comptroller General is asked to determine the total annual percentage of products containing renewable materials, recyclable materials, or recovered materials purchased by federal agencies. GAO must also look at the activities of each agency to promote recycling or composting.