THE CHALLENGE CONTINUES

Throughout its history, the plastic recycling industry has been called upon to address the challenges and opportunities involved with the ever-growing use of plastics in our society. Our industry has a track record of innovation and evolution and today, more than ever, members of the Association of Plastic Recycling (APR) are recognized by the business community, environmental activists, policymakers and other stakeholders as an important component to achieve a circular economy for plastics.

In 2019, the APR continued to expand and enhance our role as the Voice of Plastics Recycling®. As this report outlines, APR works every day to communicate the value of recycled plastics and to expand demand for products made from recycled plastics, while increasing the supply and quality of material for processing by our members. Our goal is to ensure recycled plastics are recognized as a conduit to the circular economy, and to increase the value of postconsumer resin (PCR).

APR’s message is simple and direct: Recycling works.

This powerful message is embedded in the multi-faceted strategic communications and advocacy campaign that APR launched in 2019 to support our industry. Our campaign has continued to solidify APR as the “go-to” resource for facts and data to help regulators, policymakers, elected officials, journalists and others to obtain accurate information about our industry and plastic recycling issues. Our efforts have led us across the country, including Fort Collins, Colorado to address the 2,000 members of the Society of Environmental Journalists and Bentonville, AR to present the APR Design® Guide as part of Walmart’s Sustainability Summit held for all their global merchants and suppliers.

We continue to find new ways to communicate with our members and other stakeholders. In early 2020, we will launch APR’s Recycled Content podcast. It will be available anywhere you download your favorite podcasts, will feature key leaders and innovators in our industry, as well as policymakers, experts and others for wide-ranging discussions about issues related to plastic recycling.

APR expanded its advocacy efforts in 2019 by elevating our government relations activities to ensure that our voice is heard in Washington, DC and at the state level. We will continue focusing on these efforts as plastic packaging regulatory initiatives become more prevalent in state capitals, on Capitol Hill, and overseas.

APR members continued to benefit from APR’s innovative programs and publications. Numerous APR Design® Guide Training Programs were help around the country in 2019. In addition to introducing the APR Design® Guide to Walmart merchants and suppliers through a unique webinar series created by our staff, APR expanded the APR Recycling Demand Champions Campaign which created new markets for more than 30 million pounds of material, with more exciting announcements coming soon.
We are excited about the many new programs APR will launch in 2020. The final version of The APR’s Sortation Potential Protocol will be published and The APR Design® Guide will be transitioned to a more interactive format with an expanded user-friendly platform. The new platform will include information on packaging requirements around the world and how these requirements compare to the APR Design Guide. We will also continue work with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission as they seek to update and improve the Green Guides.

None of these accomplishments are possible without the support of our members. I want to take this opportunity to thank all our members for your active participation in our association. Our members are the key to APR’s success and I thank you.

I encourage you to review this report and, as always, I welcome your comments.

Sincerely,

Steve Alexander
President and CEO
Steve@plasticsrecycling.org
WORKING TO GROW PLASTICS RECYCLING – 2019 IN REVIEW

MEMBERSHIP & COMMUNICATIONS

Membership

In 2019, APR welcomed 38 new member companies. For reference, this is nearly double the number of new members attained in 2018.

We have also seen positive growth in attendance at APR member meetings. In 2019, we hosted the two largest meetings in APR history, each with 260+ attendees. High attendance made for robust participation in committee meetings and lively networking during receptions.

Pro-Recycling Strategic Communications

Through APR’s continued partnership with Bracewell’s Policy Resolution Group, a Washington DC based firm that provides government relations, strategic communications and legal representation services, we have worked to counteract negative media coverage of recycling issues through a steady stream of positive and educational news about plastics recycling. A variety of resources were developed throughout 2019 including key messages, talking points and communication templates. As part of this effort APR saw increased and broader media coverage. Some highlights include: NPR (8/20/2019), Chicago Sun Times Letter to the Editor (7/17/2019), Fox 5 News (6/23/2019), and The Hill (2/28/2019).

APR’s website traffic experienced record growth in 2019. Unique visitors to the site increased from 8,574 in January 2019 to 18,953 in January 2020. Hits or individual clicks while visiting the site increased from 720,531 in January 2019 to 1,269,138 in January 2020.

APR’s strategic communications work crosses over online where our social media accounts are growing and we are providing engaging content like graphics and videos.

In 2019, we saw a 50% increase in Facebook followers and a 45% increase in Twitter followers. APR also launched a new LinkedIn page in 2019 to increase member engagement, as well as improve and increase informational posts. In reaching more users, we are also driving discussion. In the 4th Quarter of 2019 alone, we recorded exponential growth in the key metrics of engagements and interactions.
Legislative activity

Legislative movement around plastics is on the rise. In 2019, at the federal level, APR advocated for plastic recycling by working with several trade groups to introduce both the RECOVER (H.R.5115) and RECYCLE (S.2941) Acts, which provide funding for expanding recycling infrastructure and consumer educational programs designed to reduce contamination in the bin. APR is part of the leadership of an industry effort to spearhead much needed changes to the national regulatory climate impacting recycling, with proposals to be introduced in the latter half of 2020.

In California, APR worked with the Governor’s office and Calrecycle to ensure that any legislative proposal treated all materials and resins equally. In other states, APR lead a coalition effort which resulted in the Governor of Florida vetoing a bill that would have allowed collected recyclables to be discarded into landfills; worked with the state of Maine on a tethered caps bill; and worked with state regulators in Oregon, New York, and Washington on regulations regarding the term “recyclable,” as well as additional market issues.

Partnerships

APR expanded our work with Walmart, the world’s largest retailer, by hosting a series of APR Design Guide for Plastics Recyclability webinars for Walmart merchants and suppliers, which introduced the importance of design and sortation to more than 2000 packaging engineers and brand managers. We saw record registration numbers, which doubled from 2018. Recordings and presentation slides are available on the APR website. Topics included:

- Overview of Plastics Packaging
- Why Is/Isn’t My Plastic Recyclable?
- PET Packaging
- HDPE and PP Packaging
- Flexible Packaging (Bags/Wraps/Films)
- Using More PCR
In addition, APR delivered a keynote address to the Walmart Sustainability Summit before more than 800 suppliers in November.

APR continues to play a key role in the implementation of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation Global Plastics Commitment (GPC) by partnering with other organizations to form the US-based management arm of the GPC effort called the US PACT. The US PACT will work to ensure that brand commitments reflect the needs of the US marketplace. This is critical to ensure that the Commitment has the intended impact to enhance the sustainability and expansion of recycling of plastics packaging in the US.

**OLEFIN/RIGIDS PROGRAM**

The APR Recycling Demand Champions Campaign plays a prominent role in expanding the market for recycled plastics, driving investment, and increasing supply. Champion companies commit to using more PCR in the coming year in 3 possible ways:

- Purchase “work in process” (WIP) durable goods for use in manufacturing facilities.
- Develop a new application for PCR.
- Increase PCR usage in a current application.
APR is partnering with state organizations (the first being the Pennsylvania Recycling Markets Center) to promote the APR Recycling Demand Champions program.

**Additional “demand pull” projects** included the promotion of residential PCR for use in the manufacture of curbside waste and recycling roll carts and a multifaceted plan, focused in the Northeast, to expand the use of infrastructure pipe containing PCR by cities and states.

**The PCR Certification Subcommittee**, comprised of plastic reclaimers and brand name companies, continued its important work in investigating and working towards a system which results in industry definition and verification of PCR. It is anticipated that an APR Program for PCR Certification, a result of this Subcommittee’s work, will be launched during the first quarter of 2020.

**APR’s Recycle Grocery Rigid Plastics Project** was successfully initiated several years ago and managed by a third party. At its peak, it involved 25 grocery chains and over 4,500 supermarket sites. In 2019, the project was brought in-house with the goal of revitalizing the program under APR’s direction. With a newly updated web site, introductory flyer, and a comprehensive revamp of the “How to Recycle Grocery Rigid Plastics” Guidebook, the stage is set for 2020 goals: to verify and benchmark ongoing program participation and to encourage at least two additional grocery chains to initiate rigid recycling programs in their stores.

**PET & OLEFIN TECHNICAL, THE APR DESIGN® GUIDE FOR PLASTICS RECYCLABILITY**

The APR Design® Guide Training Program continues progress with a growing number of companies each year. In 2019, APR held the first-ever APR Design® Guide for Plastics Recyclability Regional Training Conference. Consumer brand companies, resin producers, packaging manufacturers, and others came together to learn how materials flow through the recycling system. The training included a MRF tour and a live demonstration of APR’s Sortation Potential Protocols, allowing attendees to experience how package design features ultimately affect sortation in an operating MRF.

**Two comprehensive new PET shrink and pressure sensitive label resource documents** were developed by a working group and added to PET label resources section of the APR Design® Guide for Plastics Recyclability. These documents outline key information needed to develop, specify and bring to market solutions to ensure label compatibility with PET recycling, including detail on the potential impact of labels, pertinent resources, and the relevant APR testing methods.
A Label working group was formed to address APR Design® Guide language describing the impact of label surface area on optical sortation of PET bottles. This group is also considering content that might speak to product stewardship impact of ink and adhesives on PET recycling.

PET Applications Guidance Tests were updated by a working group. These tests are expected to be approved early in 2020.

APR Design Guide language for colored PET bottles is being developed. A specific example addresses what shades of blue are acceptable in the PET recycling stream.

Critical Guidance Tests for HDPE Containers were developed and approved.

Considerable progress has been made in addressing black plastics, including the standardization of black colorants that will sort on existing NIR optical sorters in a MRF. This has required a substantial investment in innovation from color masterbatch companies that participate at APR. Assistance from companies that produce NIR optical sorters has also been an essential contribution.

A working group was created in 2019 to develop APR Design® Guide language speaking to HDPE and PP personal care tube packages. Companies have developed tubes that are compatible with the HDPE and PP recycling streams. This development must now be standardized and systems and education created that allow local communities to include recyclable tubes in the collection stream when they are more widely available.

APR’s Critical Guidance Recognition continues to grow with a record 10 companies in 2019. Several others are already in the works for 2020.

Global Harmonization efforts continued as APR participated in the RePlas Conference sponsored by the Chinese Scrap Plastics Association in Suzhou, China last November. This is a first step to establish Design Guidance and Testing in China to support local industry and to also benefit those products produced in China and exported to the US.

Two comprehensive new PET label resource documents were developed that outline key information needed to develop, specify and market, solutions to ensure label compatibility with PET recycling, including detail on the potential impact of labels, pertinent resources, and the relevant APR testing methods.

The APR PET Problem Bottle Program continued as a focus for 2019, with “Five for Focus” letters going out in March to all APR brand and PET package converter members. APR also issued and nationally distributed a press release to draw attention to five key design areas that are potentially problematic for recycling: pressure sensitive labels, PETG sleeve labels, barrier containers, attached
metals and extrusion blow-molded PETG containers. This outreach has resulted in greater awareness of these issues, active interest in assessing more recycling-compatible options, and a push for positive change, particularly for labels in 2019.

**PET Technical Working Groups** played an important role in furthering APR design guidance in 2019, with the label working group completing the label documents mentioned above. Another working groups’ focus is to expand APR guidance pertaining to sleeve label container coverage and label ink impacts; the other to further design guidance pertaining to the use of oxygen scavenger additives in PET.

The **PET Reclaimer Working Group** continued as a forum for shared issues and potential solutions, generally pertaining to problem bottles and postconsumer PET supply. This group will continue to evolve and become more structured in 2020 to productively prioritize and address issues of shared interest.

**FILM RECLAMATION**

The development of APR’s Critical Guidance Protocol for PE film packaging saw continued progress in 2019. The Committee is overseeing a project to validate packaging features in the protocol which include:

- Heavily printed PE films
- PE/PP laminations (at 25% and 100% PP concentrations)
- EVOH (with and without compatibilizer)
- Mineral filled PE

A number of Film Committee members are now **APR Recycling Demand Champions**. The Film Committee has also formed a working group to look into **film PCR recycled content certification** from a technical perspective, investigating ways in which technology may be used to track recycled content.

APR is engaged with **the WRAP program** currently underway in Seattle and King County, Washington, where plastic film will no longer be accepted curbside in 2020. New markets are being sought to support expansion of retail collection into small chains and other diverse venues. APR is working closely with The Recycling Partnership to ensure that large retailers such as Amazon and Walmart are full participants.

APR continues to monitor the **Material Recovery for the Future (MRFF) project**, which has now introduced curbside film recycling to a number of communities in eastern Pennsylvania serviced by J.P. Mascaro’s Total Recycle MRF. The MRFF project applied funding to significantly retrofit the MRF so it could handle and process flexible packaging. The MRF is now producing a “Flex Bale” with a paper fiber content at this point of less than 30%. Various companies are testing bales for use in applications mostly involving heavy molded products for industrial or construction use.
The Foundation for Plastic Recycling, APR’s philanthropic arm, continues to build its brand, areas of focus and fundraising strategy. The mission of the Foundation is to drive sustainability solutions for plastics recycling and to support the Circular Economy. Areas of focus include consumer education, industry research and innovation. All programs and services offered by the Foundation are funded through financial investments and grants. Governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, the Foundation added two new Board members in 2019 - Ed Socci with PepsiCo and Stephanie Baker with KW Plastics.

A full list of Foundation Board members can be found at www.plasticsrecycling.org/Foundation.