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For immediate release

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New report finds Colorado recycles only 27% of paper, far less than half national average
Producer Responsibility policy will improve recycling throughout Colorado and will reduce climate pollution, save money for local governments, and build stronger supply chains

BOULDER - Despite the fact that paper is highly recyclable, Colorado recycles only 27% of paper products including cardboard boxes, newspaper, magazines, junk mail, and printed paper. Paper makes up 19% of waste the state buries in landfills each year. Paper recycling rates, and those of other materials, are lagging in Colorado because the state lacks a convenient, equitable and sustainable recycling system. This is also a lost economic opportunity: Colorado buries over \$100 million worth of recyclable materials in landfills each year that could have instead been sold for recycling and remanufactured into new materials to support a stronger supply chain and local economy.

The Colorado Producer Responsibility bill, HB22-1355, will greatly improve paper recycling rates and those of other materials by providing convenient recycling to all Colorado residents at no charge. The bill fundamentally transforms Colorado's recycling system by requiring producers of printed paper, cardboard, and other metal, glass, and plastic packaging to pay into a fund based on the amount of their products sold into the state. The fund will be used to expand and manage a coordinated, statewide recycling system so that everyone in Colorado would have easy access to recycling at no additional cost to them or taxpayers. Businesses would gain access to a reliable source of recycled materials like glass, aluminum, and paper from our recycling bins to help offset current challenges with supply chain shortages.

Right now, taxpayers and local governments are on their own to figure out recycling programs, resulting in an inconvenient, inconsistent and largely inequitable set of programs with much higher costs in rural areas and dozens of communities where curbside recycling does not exist.

Local government leaders from the Colorado Municipal League and Colorado Communities for Climate Action (CC4CA) are in strong support of producer responsibility, offering a way to reduce costs for local governments, remove barriers for consumers, and expand recycling

services and access for everyone. Over 20 local governments testified in support of HB22-1355 during the first committee hearing,

“Increased recycling of paper and other materials will significantly reduce climate pollution, save money for local governments, create more resilient local supply chains, and reduce waste to landfills,” says State Representative Lisa Cutter, the bill sponsor.

The new report focuses on paper recycling as one example of how Colorado lags behind on recycling and how HB22-1355 will increase recycling for all materials. HB22-1355 is based on successful producer responsibility programs across Canada and Europe that have resulted in recycling rates of 70-80%.

Key findings in the report:

- Colorado’s recycling rate for paper is only 27%, far less than half the national average of 68%.
- The recycling rate for printed paper, not including cardboard, is only 11%.
- Paper is over 19% of the waste sent to landfills in Colorado.
- Colorado landfilled over 1.1 million tons of cardboard and paper in 2020 – nearly three times more than it recycled.
- Producer Responsibility policies are proven to increase recycling rates. For example, in Ireland, after enacting a Producer Responsibility program, recycling rates for paper and packaging jumped from 19% in 2000 to 65% in 2017.
- HB1355 will fund convenient, equitable recycling programs across Colorado to increase recycling of paper, glass, metal, cardboard, and plastics.
- Recent investments in paper recycling have focused on manufacturing infrastructure and not the collection systems needed to improve recycling in Colorado. None of those manufacturing investments have been made in Colorado.

Better paper recycling is just one example of how HB1355 will benefit Colorado. There are tremendous benefits for recycling more aluminum, cardboard, plastics, and glass. For example, a [recent report from Ball Corporation](#) found increased recycling for aluminum cans in Colorado will add 2,000 jobs and shows increasing Colorado’s recycling rate of aluminum cans from 14% to 90% would generate an additional \$31.9 million for the state through material sales; add 2,000 jobs in collection, sorting and reprocessing; and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 231,600 metric tons – the equivalent of taking 50,000 cars off the road – each year.

“Colorado deserves a best in class recycling system that we know works. Amid historic supply chain disruptions, rampant climate change, and plastic pollution, there has never been a better time to transform Colorado’s recycling system to become the foundation of our circular economy for the future,” said Kate Bailey, Eco-Cycle Policy Director.

Download the report and learn more about the benefits of HB22-1355 for Colorado at www.RecyclingForAllColoradans.org.

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CoPIRG, the Colorado Public Interest Research Group, is an advocate for the public interest. We speak out for a healthier, safer world in which we're freer to pursue our own individual well-being and the common good. Visit us at www.copirg.org

Eco-Cycle started recycling in Colorado in 1976, and today employs over 65 staff and recycles over 60,000 tons of materials each year, making it one of the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit recyclers and a Zero Waste pioneer. Eco-Cycle innovates, implements, and advocates for local and global Zero Waste solutions to foster a more regenerative, equitable, and climate-resilient future. Eco-Cycle is a proud member of Recycle Colorado, a statewide non-profit organization working to advance infrastructure, end markets, and state and local policies in waste reduction, recovery and diversion. Recycle Colorado has over 300 members from across the state—from the public, private and non-profit sectors. For more information: www.ecocycle.org.