

Every Can Counts:
**An Aluminum Beverage
Can Recycling Manifesto**



Introduction

Aluminum beverage can recycling is vital to the nation's recycling system and overall economy. Since metal recycles forever, aluminum cans are already the most recycled beverage container in the United States and the world with nearly 5 million beverage cans recycled every hour in the United States. Most recycled cans are turned into new cans, making the aluminum beverage can a textbook example of the circular economy. Can manufacturers, consumers, aluminum recyclers, beverage brands and everyone along the existing circular system should be proud of the aluminum beverage can's industry-leading U.S. recycling rate that averaged around 50 percent over the past 20 years.

And yet, recycling rates in the United States have been in decline in recent years. The industry continues to use as much recycled material as possible – with an industry leading 73 percent recycled content in the average aluminum can. But too much infinitely recyclable aluminum is going to landfill – at major economic and environmental cost.

We can do better. While around 45 billion aluminum beverage cans are recycled each year in the United States, a near equal amount goes to landfills. Current technology and infrastructure could allow us to capture and recycle all of these cans. We simply need to keep these cans in the existing circular system.

We must do better. Capturing all used aluminum beverage cans currently landfilled in the United States would generate an additional \$800 million each year, providing much needed revenue for the recycling system as a whole. The environmental impact is also profound. If we recycled every can in the United States, we could save more than 5 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year, the equivalent of taking more than 1 million vehicles off the road.

We will do better. The aluminum beverage can was designed as an easy to recycle package that delivered superior performance. For decades, the industry has worked to grow the can's recycling rate from an estimated 15 percent in 1972 when a rate was first calculated. While the beverage can's recycling rate is significantly better than other beverage containers, it is time for all of us to do more to keep cans in circulation ... not in landfills.

We have a material in aluminum that can be recycled forever. We know the potential environmental and economic impact of recycling every can. We understand where cans are being lost. And we can recycle every aluminum can produced using today's technology and infrastructure.

Let's work together to capture every can because ... ***Every Can Counts.***



Every Can Counts: The Circular Story

Aluminum cans are the most sustainable beverage package on [virtually every measure](#). With the most inherent material value, highest recycling rate and significant amounts of recycled content, aluminum cans are tailor-made for a modern, circular economy.

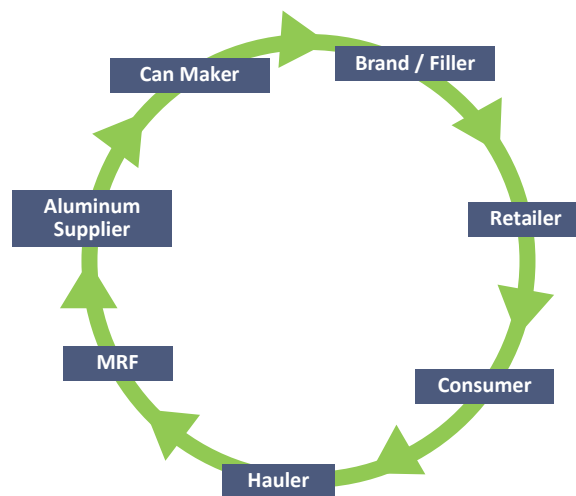
And while glass and plastic PET are typically downcycled a single time into products like carpet fiber or landfill cover (when they are recycled at all), the vast majority of recycled aluminum cans become new aluminum cans.

This high level of aluminum can recycling has a significant economic impact that is vital to the U.S. recycling system. A [recent analysis](#) found that without the revenue from used beverage cans most material recovery facilities (MRFs) would not be able to operate. More generally, the metal recycling industry has a greater economic impact and supports more American jobs than the industries of all recyclable commodities [combined](#).

The economic logic is simple – the more aluminum returned to the recycling stream, the healthier the system is overall. According to The Recycling Partnership’s [2020 State of Curbside report](#), aluminum packaging represents only 3 percent of the weight but nearly half of the economic value of recyclable material generated by all U.S. single-family homes.

More aluminum returned to the recycling system also raises the potential for carbon savings. The average aluminum beverage can in the United States has 73 percent recycled content. This is significant because making an aluminum can from recycled material [saves more than 90 percent](#) of the energy needed to make a can from virgin material. Since metal recycles forever, the industry can keep making new cans from old ones. In fact, around [75 percent](#) of all aluminum ever produced is still in use today.

The aluminum beverage can is the king of recycling. It is time to build on this strength. Every aluminum beverage can should have a circular story.



Every Can Counts: The Industry's Approach



The aluminum beverage can industry has invested millions of dollars over the decades to increase beverage can recycling.

Here is what we are doing today to **capture every can**:

Research & Data

The aluminum beverage can industry develops ongoing, high-quality research, data and reporting to educate customers, consumers, policymakers and other stakeholders on the state of aluminum can recycling and sustainability in the United States.

- **Transparent Reporting on Key Metrics:** The Aluminum Association and the Can Manufacturers Institute (CMI) release a regularly updated set of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the aluminum can. These KPIs include the aluminum can's recycling rate, value per ton and recycled content and its results are compared to glass and PET plastic. Visit www.aluminum.org/CanAdvantage for more information.
- **Life Cycle Analysis:** The industry releases an ongoing, peer-reviewed life cycle assessment (LCA) report to explain the container's overall environmental impact. The first aluminum beverage can LCA was completed in 1993 and it was most recently updated in 2014, with a 2021 update forthcoming.
- **Modeling the Impact of Increased Can Recycling:** A [recent report](#) used a material flow analysis to show definitively that aluminum cans, as compared to plastic PET and glass bottles, have the highest circular performance in today's U.S. recycling system as well as the highest circular potential.
- **Recycling Behavior Literature Review:** CMI compiled a [literature review](#) of available research on what motivates recycling behavior to better understand and engage with consumers that have access to curbside recycling, use a lot of beverage cans but do not recycle consistently.
- **Cans Drive the U.S. Recycling System:** Another [recent study](#) found that the relatively high value of used beverage cans (UBC) make them essential to the country's network of material recovery facilities (MRFs), which separate single stream recyclables. In fact, the report found that without the revenue from UBCs, most MRFs in the United States would not be able to operate.

Every Can Counts: The Industry's Approach

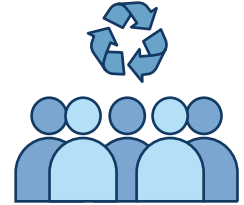
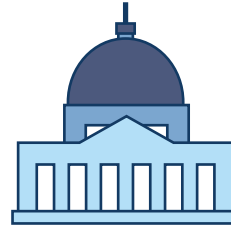


Industry & Consumer Engagement and Education

Aluminum beverage can customers and consumers have a vital role to play in driving increased aluminum can recycling. The aluminum can industry works to educate these groups in several ways.

- **Container Design Guide:** In the fall of 2020, the Aluminum Association released [Four Keys to Circular Recycling: An Aluminum Container Design Guide](#). The guide lays out key principles for beverage companies to consider so that container design choices do not needlessly disrupt recycling efforts.
- **Effective On-Can Messaging:** The [Metal Recycles Forever™](#) logo is used all around the world on cans and aligns with recent [research from Penn State University](#) that consumers are motivated to recycle if the transformational nature of a material is emphasized on the packaging. The can industry is working with U.S. beverage brands to replace the “please recycle” message with more effective Metal Recycles Forever logo.
- **Convenience Store Aluminum Can Recycling Toolkit:** National Association of Convenience Stores and CMI developed a toolkit, [The Value of Can and Bottle Recycling](#), that highlights the value of recycling at convenience stores and provides steps to improve recycling at these locations.
- **Aluminum Can Capture Equipment at MRFs:** : Aluminum can makers support both public and private investment for additional aluminum can capture equipment, including [eddy current separators](#) and robots. Recent [CMI research](#) found this equipment can often pay for itself in a year or two from the revenue generated by the additional cans captured. CMI, with funding from Ardagh Group and Crown Holdings, will make [grants](#) available to MRFs in 2021 for aluminum can capture equipment. The results of the program are expected to encourage more MRFs to invest in additional aluminum can capture equipment.

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Policy

The aluminum can industry supports a variety of policy programs and efforts to improve overall recycling infrastructure in the United States.

- **Container Deposit Programs:** As policymakers look to improve recycling across-the-board, [well-designed container deposit programs](#) should be considered. While the recycling rate for aluminum cans is about 35 percent in states without container deposit laws, rates average more than 75 percent in the 10 states with these programs.
- **Circular Economy Accelerator Bill:** CMI and the Aluminum Association participate in the TRP's [Circular Economy Accelerator](#) program, which advocates for increased investment to fund recycling operations, infrastructure and education. Both CMI and the Aluminum Association signed on to TRP's recently released [white paper](#) outlining a model policy approach.

Stakeholder Engagement

The aluminum can industry supports a variety of organizations that advance recycling research, engagement, education, policy and infrastructure.

- **EPA America Recycles Day Coalition:** CMI and the Aluminum Association are among the [more than 200 signatories](#) to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) [America Recycles Pledge](#), and we support the agency's efforts to advance its [strategic framework](#) to create a stronger, more resilient U.S. recycling system.
- **The Recycling Partnership:** The Aluminum Association and CMI are financial contributors to The Recycling Partnership, which is a leading, national force for improving recycling. The Aluminum Association and CMI were involved from TRP's start and [since its inception](#), TRP has leveraged more than \$90 million in impact by diverting more than 230 million pounds of recyclables from landfills.
- **Consumer Brands Association (CBA) Recycling Leadership Council (RLC):** CMI is one of the diverse group of stakeholders that is collaborating with the [CBA's RLC](#) to build a public policy framework to fundamentally reimagine the U.S. recycling system. The framework is due out by early 2021.
- **Container Recycling Institute:** The Aluminum Association and CMI are participating members of the [Container Recycling Institute](#), which has a mission to make North America a global model for the collection and quality recycling of packaging materials.