

Giving Americans what they want: clear, consistent recycling rules

Americans want solutions that reduce waste and keep plastics out of landfills. **Advanced recycling is one of those solutions.** It breaks down plastics to their molecular building blocks and creates a new path for recycling everyday products such as potato chip bags that traditional recycling cannot easily handle. But today's recycling rules are inconsistent and confusing.

Federal legislation, complemented by an update to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Green Guides, can help ensure recycling claims keep pace with innovation and bring needed clarity for businesses and consumers alike.

A recent study gives insight into what Americans think and want.¹

What Americans think

More than **9 out of 10 Americans agree** that advanced recycling is recycling.²

Nearly **8 out of 10 Americans agree** that advanced recycling is a recycling solution, even when the end product is not plastic.³

These views reflect a simple reality: Americans don't distinguish between recycling technologies. They care that waste is put back into productive use.

What Americans want

Americans who consider recycling when making purchasing decisions support the use of mass balance accounting for making recycled content claims. Similar accounting methods are already allowed to support renewable energy claims. It is time for federal legislation and the FTC's Green Guides to align with this consensus.

Nearly **8 out of 10 Americans agree** that mass balance in advanced recycling is an appropriate basis for labeling recycled content.⁴

79 percent support mass balance in advanced recycling and 61.3 percent in renewable energy.⁵

What policymakers can do

It's time for policymakers to align federal rules with positions Americans already support. To provide clear, consistent rules that consumers need to inform their purchasing decisions, policymakers must:

- **Modernize federal law and guidance** to officially recognize advanced recycling as a legitimate form of recycling.
- **Update federal law and guidance** to allow marketers to make recycled content claims using mass balance accounting, similar to what is already allowed for supporting renewable energy claims.

Advancing these policies can help America lead in keeping more plastic in the economy and out of landfills.

Footnotes

1. These views were recorded in a study titled "Consumer Understanding of Recycling Claims," by J. Howard Beales III, George Washington School of Business, Published July 2026.
 2. 93 percent of the intended respondents considered it to be recycling when "Plastics are chemically broken down into smaller molecules which are used to make plastic pellets to produce new plastic products."
 3. When respondents were asked: "Plastics are chemically broken down into smaller molecules which are used to make fuels such as gasoline," 79.0 percent said the use is recycling.
 4. The survey described the core concept of mass balance accounting, labeling outputs in proportion to inputs when an output cannot be traced to a specific input, as it applied to three examples. Respondents were asked how appropriate the approach is for marketing/labeling recycled content or renewable energy. A substantial majority of the intended respondents (79.0 percent) believed that a mass balance approach to labeling recycled content when plastic waste is mixed with raw materials from fossil fuels was completely or somewhat appropriate.
 5. 79.0 percent of the intended audience indicated that a mass balance approach is completely or somewhat appropriate for a process that mixes four pounds of plastic waste with six pounds of fossil fuels to produce four pounds of new products that could be labeled as recycled content. This was significantly higher than the 61.3 percent who said that a mass balance approach is completely or somewhat appropriate for marketing green power.
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