

Our Shared Future: Government Regulations to Improve Plastic Recycling

Governments around the world increasingly understand that plastic is a valuable resource for their economy, both now and in the future. Virtually all industries — electronics, automotive and foods, just to name a few — rely on high-quality plastics for their innovative products.

Our planet needs ground-breaking technologies to reduce the impact on our environment, [oceans and marine ecosystems](#). Leading companies with closed loop recycling programs provide a solution, helping “[Close the Tap](#)” on ocean-bound plastics and move toward the ideal system — “[Infinite Recycling](#)” where plastics live infinitely.

At the same time, governments have a role to play in:

- Making sure used plastics are effectively collected and diverted from landfills
- Restricting the distribution of single-use plastics
- Supporting research on improving recycling technologies
- Educating the public about plastic recycling

From “blue boxes” to banning single-use plastics, here are some North America’s leading regulatory initiatives, either already existing or proposed, to improve plastics recycling.

CANADA

Canada’s single-use plastics ban (sometime after 2021)

Here is a big one — Canada’s federal government plans on introducing a single-use plastics ban to cut down on products that are difficult to recycle, such as straws, take-out containers and grocery bags. The ban will be implemented under the [Canadian Environmental Protection Act](#) following scientific assessments of each individual plastic product.

In the long-term, the law aims to allow plastics that can be recycled into the market, and encourage consumers to keep using their recycling bins.

The initial timeline to implement the ban was 2021, but that will likely be delayed due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Canada is not alone in its efforts to reduce single-use plastics, as California is also considering an ambitious plan to cut down on their use.

“Blue boxes” in Ontario and other jurisdictions

The programs have many names — “blue box,” “blue bin,” “blue bag,” or sometimes “green box.” They’re the household programs for diverting plastics into recycling and away from the landfill. Each household collects plastics, drops them in the “blue box” for the municipality to pick up, which then returns the box immediately for the consumer to use again.

Originating in Kitchener, Ontario, in 1981, the household recycling programs are now in 150 countries around the world.

UNITED STATES

US States — Bans or Mandatory Recycling for Plastic Bottles (ongoing)

Some states in the US passed legislation requiring either mandatory recycling or an outright ban on plastic bottles to increase the quantities of plastic being diverted from landfill or incineration.

According to [PlasticsRecycling.org](https://www.plasticsrecycling.org), the list currently includes seven states:

- California
- Connecticut
- Massachusetts
- New Jersey
- North Carolina
- Pennsylvania
- Wisconsin

As the world moves into the 2020s, we are likely to see more states join this list.

Of course, it's possible consumers will recycle their plastic bottles on their own without a law telling them to do so. Nevertheless, these state governments believe the implications are important enough to warrant a law communicating the priority. Plus, there will inevitably be a bit of laziness where consumers throw the used bottles into the garbage or leave them outside, where they can wash into rivers, lakes or oceans to affect maritime life.

US Federal Law — Plastic Waste Reduction and Recycling Act (2020)

US Representative Haley Stevens of Michigan has lamented that the United States recycles only nine percent of its plastic waste. In fact, Representative Stevens is so concerned that she teamed up with Anthony Gonzalez of Ohio, introducing a bill — [Plastic Waste Reduction and Recycling Act](#) — aimed at reducing plastic waste and improving the global competitiveness of the United States plastics recycling industry.

Specifically, if passed, the act would:

- Direct the establishment of a plastic waste reduction and recycling research and development program
- Call on the US government to develop a strategic plan for plastic waste reduction
- Call for the development of standards for plastics recycling technologies

The commitment is growing. The bill could come with investments. It would authorize funding for five years and invest \$85 million in 2021 for recycling. It's also widely supported. As a bipartisan bill, it has sponsors and supporters from both the Democratic and Republican parties.

We are Only at the Beginning

We are only at the beginning. Governments worldwide are starting to see the long-term adverse effects of plastics going into landfills and beginning to realize the positive benefits of recycling. Governments don't recycle. Industry leaders like Lavergne build and grow their closed loops. However, governments set the environment and make these innovations possible.

Let's work together — business and government — to build a future where we can meet the economy's needs without producing any new plastics.