

Plastic Circularity Council Meeting: 11/14/2023

Agenda:

Next meeting time

Goals and goals and objectives for 2024 state of plastics recycling in Colorado

Member introductions

Rebecca Hayes: GM of Ridwell in Denver, they collect and recycle items, including a lot of plastic material, and really looking to increase end markets.

Justin Stockdale: Zero Waste hauling interim director for eco cycle in Boulder.

Jennifer Freeman: Director of Public Relations and Government Affairs for Swire Coca Cola also served on the board of recycle Colorado.

Josh Taylor: With waste management, the manager of the Franklin Street MRF in Denver, also have some oversight of the operation up in Fort Collins with the Larimer County landfill.

Alice Jin: From Rocky tech, current CTO of Rocky tech, develop chemical additives to improve the qualities of a recycled plastics, mainly polyethylene and polypropylenes

Kate Bailey: Works with the Association of Plastic Recyclers, a national trade association representing companies involved in recycling plastic packaging, including reclaimers and converters.

Darla Aaron: Serves as the EPR lead for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

She requests that attendees include their organization in their screen name to help her remember everyone.

Mick Barry: President of Event to B to LLC and Mid America Recycling, a past board member of the Colorado Association, and a part-time resident of Salida with strong Colorado ties. He has significant involvement in recycling activities locally, across the Midwest, and nationally, having been the past chair of the National Recycling Coalition.

Laura Levesque: A community campaigns project manager at Eco-Cycle, working on the Technical Assistance service provider program, offering technical consulting to local governments and municipalities in Colorado's Front Range.

Reenee Casapulla: From Foam Cycle, based in New Jersey, and a member of Recycled Colorado for five years. She mentions Foam Cycle's recycling system for expanded polystyrene located at Sustainability in Denver, Colorado.

Michelle Gazarik: Works at Eco-Cycle, managing the front desk and emails part-time, and gives tours to visitors.

Neal Noble: Encountered audio issues. He is with Republic Services, serves as a Recycle Colorado Board member, and is the Board Liaison for this council.

Kevin Sullivan: Involved in recycling technology development at the National Renewable Energy Lab and a startup focused on clothing recycling called TerraForm.

Adam Hill: Owner of Direct Polymers in Denver, specializing in post-industrial plastics recycling and expanding into post-consumer plastics recycling. He also advises on policy for reducing plastics use.

Lisa Archibald: Community Recycling Coordinator for the city of Steamboat Springs and serves on the board of Recycle Colorado.

Jonathan Levy: Director of Government Affairs for AMP Robotics and has been involved with Recycle Colorado for over two years.

Ranga: An independent consultant for zero waste based in Fort Collins and a member of Recycle Colorado, dealing with plastics as a significant aspect of zero waste.

Anna Marino: A Sustainability and Water Conservation Specialist with the town of Erie, focusing on waste reduction.

Megan Eibach: Works with Eco-Products as the Product and Zero Specialist for the Southwest and the Rockies, promoting circular systems and certified compostable products including PLA and other bioplastics, also have a small segment of PET and PP recycled plastics, and try to find market solutions for that as well.

Agenda 1: Whether we should skip the December meeting and reconvene in January.

There was no strong opinion against this plan, so it was decided to meet next on January 16th, which aligns with their regular schedule of meeting on the third Tuesday of each month at 1 pm.

Agenda 2: Finalize our goals and objectives for 2024 to submit for board approval

Ally shared the current mission statement of the Plastic Circularity Council.

Mission of the Plastic circularity Council is to be a collaborative resource for finding and implementing viable methods to reduce, reuse and recycle plastic products in Colorado.

The group discussed finalizing the council's purpose and roles, with Neil suggesting three initial objectives and inviting others to contribute.

Initial objectives drafted by Neil:

1. prioritizing and expanding the use of existing plastic recycling infrastructure.
2. identifying plastics that are unlikely or impossible to recycle in Colorado or in the region and stimulate reduction of these materials entering the state.
3. identifying reuse or repurposing opportunities for plastics and Colorado or the region.

Kevin questioned about the second objective if banning certain plastics was a consideration, emphasizing the need to stimulate markets for recyclable materials instead of stimulating reduction of certain plastics. The idea of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and modulation of materials was brought up as a strategy for addressing non-recyclable plastics.

Rangga added a distinction between recycling and downcycling, noting the limited recyclability of plastics and the potential end-of-life scenarios like being used in roads or park benches, which he defined as downcycling.

The conversation also highlighted the importance of Colorado's role in the national and global context of plastic use and recycling, with suggestions to connect with larger networks and elevate Colorado's profile. Liz and Kate emphasized keeping the council's mission high-level and linking it to the existing work in Colorado's circular economy, ensuring that the council adds value and supports ongoing efforts.

Justin emphasized the importance of circular solutions in line with the group's title, Circular Plastics Council, and warned against accepting iteratively circular or linear solutions, like a plastic bottle becoming a carpet and then ending up in a landfill, as true circularity.

Jennifer suggested that the council should aim to stimulate economic development around circular economies in Colorado and the Rocky Mountain region, also echoing Kate's point about elevating Colorado's profile as a recycling hub.

The group discussed the current purpose and roles, identifying the need to prioritize and expand the use of existing plastic recycling infrastructure and to find reuse or repurposing opportunities for plastics in Colorado. There was some debate around the wording and scope of identifying plastics that are difficult to recycle, with suggestions to refine the purpose to be more general.

Emily proposed defining what constitutes a circular economy for the group, which prompted a discussion about creating a hierarchy of outcomes like downcycling, recycling, and waste-to-energy, and how these fit into the group's purpose.

Liz advised against the council defining recycling for the entire membership of Recycled Colorado, instead suggesting that the council's role could be to delve into the nuances of recycling and pass vetted information to the broader organization.

Renaee shared insights from New Jersey's single-use plastics ban and stressed the importance of learning from other states' experiences to help define the group's goals and actions.

The consensus was that the purpose statement of the council should remain broad and high-level to ensure longevity and facilitate annual goal setting. Board members Jennifer and Neil were invited to comment on the board's expectations for the council's charter.

The group discussed the circularity of plastics and the need for the council to focus on circular, not linear or iteratively circular, solutions. The terms 'circularly recycled' sparked debate due to varying interpretations by the board and membership.

There was consensus on aligning with the U.S. Plastics Pact's existing terminology for consistency and unity in the system.

A suggestion was made to incorporate reduction into the charter as it aligns with the larger goal of Recycle Colorado, which isn't just about recycling but also includes reuse and reduction.

Discussion moved to how to define plastics that are difficult to recycle and the need to stimulate or reduce their use in Colorado.

Justin felt that point two was repetitive and advocated for expanding existing infrastructure and encouraging recycling rather than focusing on non-recyclable plastics.

The group considered merging points one and two to avoid redundancy and to focus on stimulating innovation, technology, and markets through EPR programs.

Laura brought up the scope of the council's work, questioning whether it should include both industrial and residential plastics.

The group agreed to wrap up the discussion and refine the purpose statement outside the meeting to present it to the board.

Agenda 3: Adam leading the final segment on the state of plastics recycling

Adam Hill shared his efforts to establish an end-market for HDPE pipe and lumber materials in Colorado, highlighting the importance of creating demand for recycled materials to ensure economic viability.

He stressed that the focus should be on developing manufacturing capabilities in Colorado to overcome logistical challenges and create a stable market for recycled materials.

Adam emphasized the volatility of plastic commodity prices and the need for consistent recycling processes, advocating for the development of a local ecosystem that supports recycling from collection to production.