



Aerosol Recycling Initiative: Propelling Increased Access and Improved Labeling

A resource for the latest information on aerosol recycling and industry efforts to increase aerosol recycling access and labeling.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



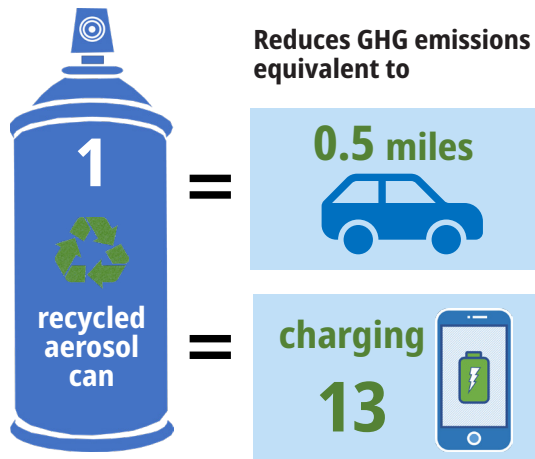
Nearly 4 billion aerosol containers – made from almost 300,000 tons of steel or aluminum – are sold in the United States (U.S.) each year. These products are then used and disposed of by consumers and workers, resulting in a significant amount of packaging material that can end up as waste in a landfill if it is not recycled.

Recently, there have been questions regarding the accessibility and safety of recycling aerosol products. However, recycling, in general, and specifically aerosol products, when incorporated as part of a broader waste management system, can provide enormous benefits to communities, the economy, and the environment. Increasing recycling reduces the need for raw material extraction by keeping valuable material in circulation, retain economic value, create jobs, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

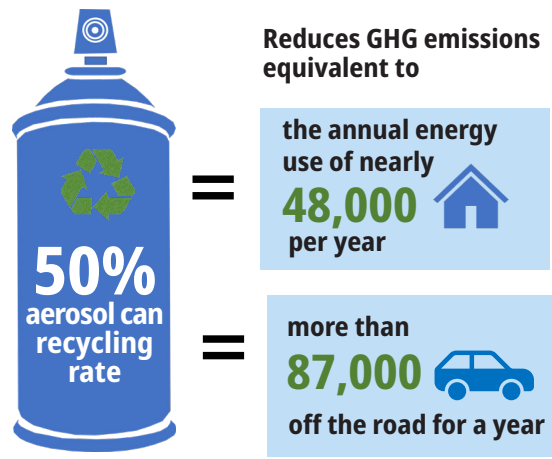
From an environmental standpoint, recycling just one aerosol reduces GHG emissions by the equivalent of driving 0.5 miles in the average gasoline-powered passenger vehicle or charging 13 smartphones.¹

Looking at a larger scale, a 50-percent recycling rate of aerosols annually delivers savings equivalent to the energy use of nearly 48,000 U.S. homes per year or the annual GHG emissions from more than 87,000 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles.¹

GREENHOUSE GAS SAVINGS EQUIVALENCY



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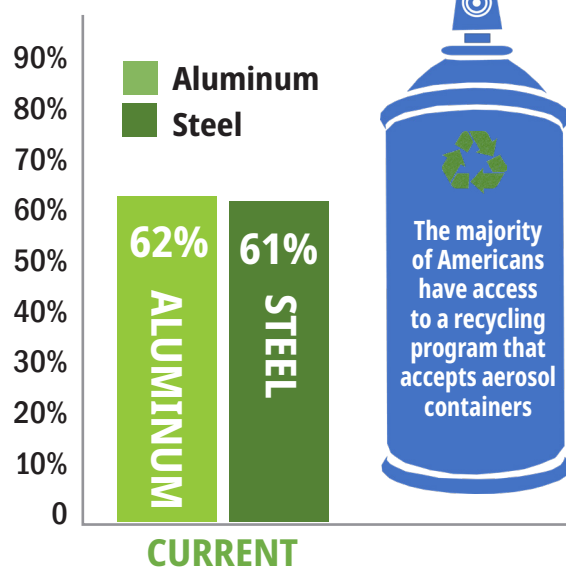


SOURCE: EUNOMIA, EPA WARM MODEL

Economically, a 50-percent recycling rate of aerosols generates more than \$39 million each year.¹ Since metal recycles forever, the benefits compound as the aluminum and steel from these products continues to be recycled.

While there are many benefits to recycling aerosol cans, there is also uncertainty about their appropriate end-of-life management. More and more stakeholders are questioning whether a product’s packaging is truly recyclable, leading to questions about recycling rates and what happens to a product after it is put in the recycling bin. This growing concern coincides with decreased opportunities for end users to recycle aerosol cans. For example, the national access rate for aerosol products (the percent of Americans with access to recycling programs that accept aerosols) dropped from 70 percent in 2016 to just above 60 percent in 2021.²

CURRENT U.S. ACCESS RATE FOR AEROSOL CAN RECYCLING



SOURCE: SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING COALITION

In order to reverse this negative trend and improve the aerosol can’s recycling story, the Can Manufacturers Institute (CMI) and the Household & Commercial Products Association (HCPA) launched the Aerosol Recycling Initiative in May 2022 with the support of 17 companies across the aerosol value chain. The Initiative aims to make recycling aerosol cans easier for the end user by achieving two quantitative goals by 2030:

- At least an 85 percent recycling access rate for aerosol cans in the U.S. market.
- At least 90 percent of aerosols labeled as recyclable with messaging about how to properly recycle them.



AEROSOL RECYCLING BY 2030





85% Achieve at least an 85 percent recycling access rate for all aerosol cans.

90% Label at least 90 percent of all aerosols as recyclable with messaging on how to properly recycle them.

WWW.THEHCPA.ORG/AEROSOL-RECYCLING-INITIATIVE

The Initiative established four focus areas and accompanying activities³ for the initial phase:

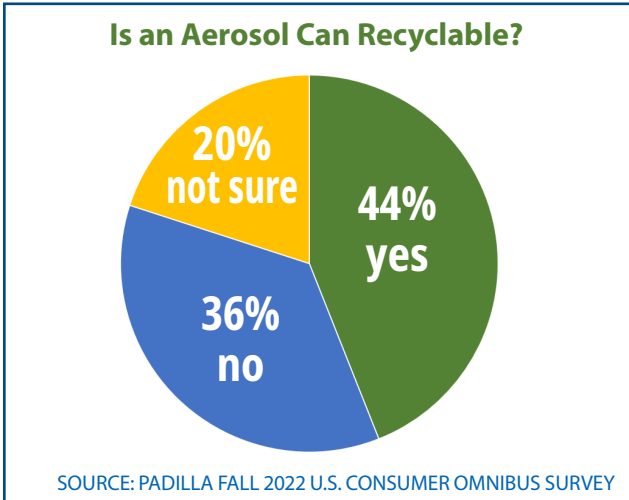
INITIAL AEROSOL RECYCLING INITIATIVE FOCUS AREAS

	Focus Area	Activity
	Addressing data gaps	Labeling analysis to establish a baseline for current recycling-related messaging on aerosols. Environmental and economic impact analysis to evaluate the potential benefits of recycling more aerosols. Aerosol can testing to assess the extent to which residual contents remain in aerosols that reach MRFs.
	Increasing the acceptance of aerosol cans at material recovery facilities (MRFs)*	Interviews with MRF operators to understand their concerns about accepting and processing aerosols.
	Understanding consumer awareness	Omnibus survey to obtain insights on consumer sentiment and awareness of recycling aerosols.
	Publishing information on the aerosol can’s recycling story	A white paper explaining the aerosol can’s recycling story.

*MRFs are where combined recyclables are sorted.

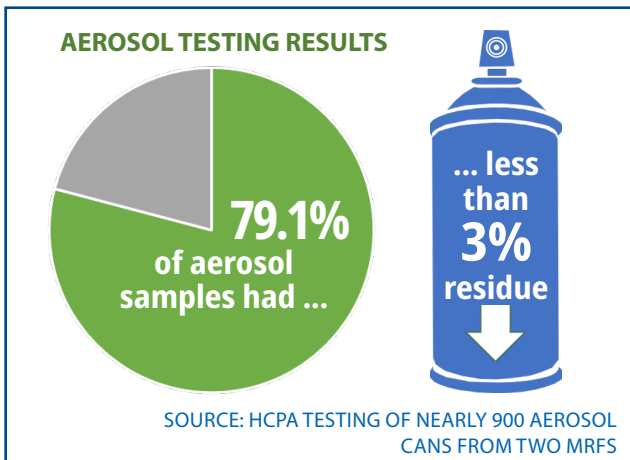
While it would be ideal for all consumers to empty aerosol cans before putting them in the recycling and for all recycling programs to accept these products at curbside, that isn't the current reality.

Data from the omnibus survey found that more than half of consumers are either unsure if aerosols can be recycled or think they are not recyclable at all.



Regarding acceptance, the Sustainable Packaging Coalition's 2020-2021 availability of recycling study found that more than 60 percent of U.S. households have access to a recycling program that accepts aerosol cans. The recycling programs that do not accept aerosol cans are reluctant to accept them mainly due to safety concerns that come from consumers not emptying the leftover product from the can.

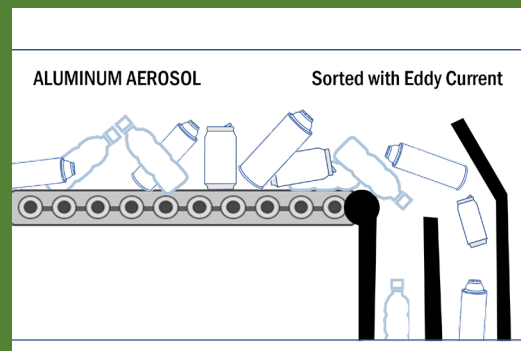
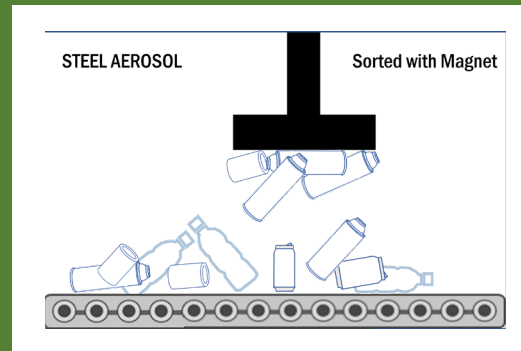
Interestingly, even with a lack of clear communication about how to dispose of an aerosol, most of these cans have no or minimal leftover product. The Initiative determined this by pressure testing more than 900 aerosols from two MRFs and found that nearly 80 percent of the tested cans had less than three percent residue.



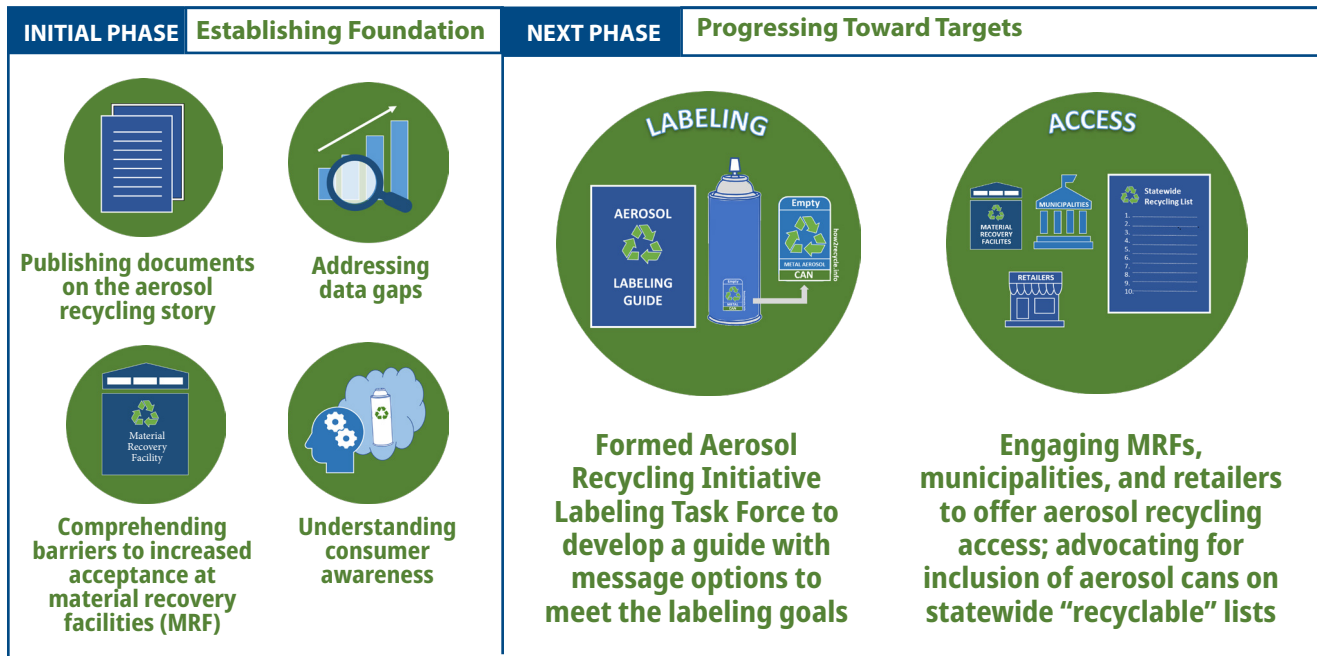
The aerosol industry believes that recycling programs and the MRFs that sort recyclables should accept aerosol cans for several reasons.

1. MRFs can sort both aluminum and steel aerosol cans with existing equipment.
2. Since aerosols are made from metal, they have ready end-markets (i.e., buyers) and can be a beneficial source of revenue for MRFs.
3. According to research from Factory Mutual Corporation, the risks associated with including empty aerosols in the recycling stream are manageable.
4. While some MRF operators perceive aerosols as a fire risk, it is actually very rare for these products to be identified as the cause of a MRF fire.
5. When a recycling program is silent regarding its acceptance of aerosols, as too many often are, consumers do not know where to empty the leftover product or how to dispose of the can.

ALUMINUM AND STEEL AEROSOLS ARE SORTED AT MATERIAL RECOVERY FACILITIES WITH EXISTING EQUIPMENT



Looking to the next phase, the Initiative has already identified areas that can help achieve the 2030 goals.



There is work to be done on the labeling goal with the labeling baseline study finding that only 29 percent of aerosol cans include messaging about how to appropriately recycle the can, specifically that the can must be empty before disposing of it. That being said, the Initiative believes this can be addressed fairly quickly since brands that sell products in aerosol cans have control over what is on the label. In fact, HCPA formed an Aerosol Recycling Initiative Labeling Task Force to help companies make certain label changes to help meet the 2030 goal while still being compliant with state and federal requirements.

Regarding access, this will involve a multi-pronged approach:

- Incentivize MRFs that do not currently accept aerosols to shift to acceptance by offering industry-funded communications to the community with directions about how to properly recycle these products.
- Educate municipalities – the MRFs’ customers – about the benefits of recycling aerosols to build a network of stakeholders who can advocate for the acceptance of these products in recycling programs.
- In areas where there is no curbside recycling program for aerosols, partner with retailers that have regular pick-ups of surplus or dented aerosols to provide consumers with a convenient recycling access point.
- Advocate for aerosols to be included on statewide “recyclable” lists, especially in states that have passed Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs for packaging. EPR laws are designed to shift the costs of managing product packaging at end-of-life from municipalities and consumers to the product manufacturers. At the time of publication, four states (California, Colorado, Maine, and Oregon) have passed such laws.

The full white paper details the data and insights that the Initiative has gathered to date regarding the accessibility, understanding, and safety of recycling aerosols in an effort to achieve the 2030 goals for the benefit of the environment and the economy.

¹Impact analysis performed by Eunomia as part of the Aerosol Recycling Initiative; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Waste Reduction Model (WARM), <https://www.epa.gov/warm>

²Sustainable Packaging Coalition, 2020-2021 Centralized Study on Availability of Recycling, <https://sustainablepackaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/UPDATED-2020-21-Centralized-Study-on-Availability-of-Recycling-SPC-3-2022.pdf>

³Our thanks to the team led by Gershwin, Brickner & Bratton (GBB) and consisting of GBB, Eunomia, and Jensen Hughes; Padilla; Resource Recycling Systems; and Factory Mutual Research Corporation for contributing to the data and insights in this report.