

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 12, 2019

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

We are writing to express our serious concerns about the state of recycling in the United States and to better understand how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is actively responding to the impact of China's "National Sword" policy. Since the policy was enacted in 2018, China has sharply reduced the import of foreign scrap materials to address environmental concerns and improve its perception among the international community. This change in policy, and after three decades of reliance on China to accept American domestic recyclables, has created a crisis for states and municipalities across the country.

In 1976, the Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) established EPA as a federal leader in the conservation and recovery of materials. Since its inception EPA has recognized the importance and impact of recycling on American prosperity and environmental protection. Yet, despite EPA's work to make recycling in the U.S. a mainstay, the nation's capacity to recycle goods at the local level is vastly inadequate.

The U.S. lacks the recycling infrastructure to meet today's demands. This is largely due to the financial trade-off made years ago between investing in local recycling infrastructure and capitalizing on the savings posed by shipping the waste overseas. Our reliance on China and the lack of local investment has resulted in the rapid decline of recycling programs across the country, with recyclable waste piling up in U.S. landfills, or worse yet, being incinerated and releasing harmful chemicals into the environment.

However, China's policy presents us with the opportunity to be leaders in the recycling industry and stop the wasteful practice of throwing valuable materials away. By helping develop a stronger and more self-reliant national recycling program, EPA can help Americans minimize waste, decrease pollution, and preserve valuable natural resources. EPA previously reported that as of 2015, over \$9 billion worth of recyclable materials were thrown away each year. Since China's policy was enacted we can surmise the value of wasted resources has only risen.

The U.S. must therefore develop a national strategy in response to this crisis, and we believe the EPA is best equipped to assist in this endeavor. We need a comprehensive solution that focuses on targeted investments in local recycling programs to enhance recycling infrastructure and promotes new technologies for sorting, reusing and converting waste into valuable goods.

Increasing public awareness on the proper handling of recyclable goods – thereby improving the quality of recycled plastic and other materials – is also critically important.

Understanding these concerns and our immediate and future needs, please provide answers to the following questions in the context of what actions have been or will be taken directly in response to China’s “National Sword” policy:

1. Has the EPA developed a national strategy in response to China’s “National Sword” policy? If not, when do you expect to develop one?
2. Managing short- and long-term risks are vital to the success of any national strategy on recycling. Previously, EPA identified a solution to the challenges of recycling to be working with stakeholders to create a more resilient recycling system capable of withstanding disruptions.

How is EPA working with stakeholders to do this? Is EPA working with the Department of Commerce, also mandated under RCRA to work in this space, to develop a more comprehensive strategy?

3. How could the EPA help consumers better manage their recyclable goods and assist states and municipalities to improve recyclable materials and maintain U.S. economic competitiveness?
4. How could the EPA support more competitive manufacturing that converts materials currently managed as waste into valuable raw materials? What research is being conducted by ORD and/or supported by the EPA to improve recycling technologies and the reuse of plastics and other materials?

The EPA has always served as a global leader in developing solutions to our most pressing environmental challenges, and Congress seeks assurances from the agency today that a national plan has been developed to manage this emerging crisis.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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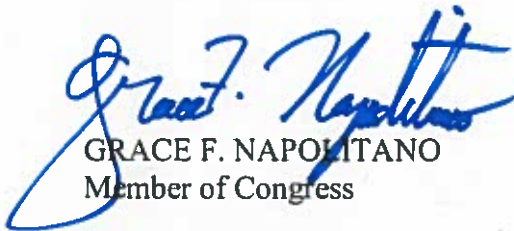
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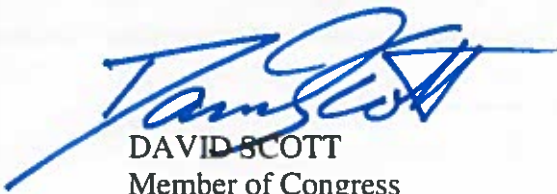
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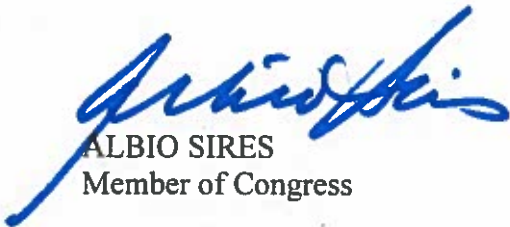
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