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2024 WM Recycling Report: Pathways to Strengthen the Nation's Recycling System

By Tara Hemmer, Chief Sustainability Officer, WM

For decades, WM has helped keep communities clean and safe by providing collection, recycling and disposal services to millions of customers across North America. While the environment has always been important to us, over the past several years, we've deepened our commitment to sustainability within our own operations and enhanced our focus on delivering circular solutions to our customers.

Today, we are executing planned investments of more than \$1.4 billion to build new and upgrade existing recycling facilities from 2022 through 2026 and improve recycling infrastructure. These investments are expected to result in approximately 40 new and upgraded facilities that have advanced technology and automation designed to increase efficiency, capture more recyclable material, and improve the quality of the material we recycle. This work is especially important right now, as many brands work toward commitments to reduce waste and expand recycled content in products.

However, we know recycling education and access gaps among Americans persist – and it will be important to address them to continue making progress. To better understand these gaps and shed light on recycling opportunities, WM commissioned a survey to investigate common recycling behaviors and perceptions among more than 1,000 consumers and businesses across the nation.

The results, shared in our new [2024 WM Recycling Report](#), point to insights and opportunities to help strengthen the nation's recycling system through collaboration across consumer households, businesses, policymakers and local municipalities

We found that many Americans want to recycle, but some lack an understanding of how recycling works and its positive impact on the environment. The results demonstrate that while 86% of people who recycle say they recycle plastic bottles and containers, 1 in 10 are not-at-all confident that their plastics are recycled. That said, we found that awareness-building contributes to greater participation, with 64% of respondents reporting that if they knew more about what to recycle and how, their involvement would increase.

At WM, we make it a priority to collaborate to advance recycling education. For example, our [Recycle Right](#) campaign with the National League of Cities helps encourage meaningful action among cities to strengthen recycling in their communities. We also continue to work with important organizations that share our vision of a strengthened U.S. recycling system through the power of working alongside others.

The results from the report also highlighted the importance of accessibility, showing that where consumers live can affect their ability to recycle. Data showed that 50% of respondents living in rural areas experience inconveniences that can lead to lower rates of recycling, such as having to drive long distances or to a different site to recycle. Access is important, and our recent recycling facility opening in [Fort Walton Beach, Florida](#), is an example of how we're investing to expand recycling access to more communities.

The report also uncovered promising insights on the business case for recycling. We found that creating products with recycled content can be a differentiator for brands and potentially drive consumer purchases. Strong end markets for recycled materials are a key part of a successful U.S. recycling system, so businesses have a vital role to play by finding ways to use more recycled materials in their products – therefore helping continue to bolster demand for recycled materials.

While there is more work to be done across households, businesses and municipalities to strengthen the nation's recycling system, we have an important opportunity to make a difference. Recycling works best when we work together. I hope you will join us on this journey to help make communities across the country more sustainable through strengthened recycling practices and infrastructure.

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