

# Opinion: Oregon can fix its broken recycling system and improve services for all

Updated Jun 21, 2021; Posted Jun 20, 2021

By Guest Columnist | The Oregonian

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Oregonians are passionate recyclers. For years, we led the nation in recycling. People expect that items collected for recycling are turned into new products and do not end up as litter or plastic debris in oceans, or cause social harm elsewhere. Over the past decade, though, we have learned that our system came to rely heavily on shipping our discarded materials to other parts of the world where they often ended up thrown away or into rivers and oceans – threatening our fisheries and our health.

Done right, recycling saves energy and reduces greenhouse gases. It helps fight water pollution, habitat disruption and air toxics. But we cannot assure the public that materials are being recycled into new products and not ending up as litter or as plastic pollution in our oceans. And we're still dumping a lot of material in landfills that should be recycled.

Senate Bill 582 is a major redesign of our system for handling discarded materials. It assures we all share in incentives to reduce the amount of materials we throw away and that recycling really works as we all expect it should. SB 582 builds on local community programs and requires producers to share in the responsibility of recycling the products they create. It is the result of nearly three years of rigorous research, community outreach and negotiations with a broad range of interested parties.

SB 582 requires producers of packaging, paper products and food serviceware to help make Oregon's recycling programs more reliable, effective and convenient. These companies will be required to help fund improvements and expansions to the recycling system, such as subsidizing recycling in rural communities, developing new collection services, creating better processing of recyclable materials and providing better education as to what can and cannot be recycled. This will reduce the amount of trash that gets into the system.

Many Oregon-based businesses support these changes – businesses like New Seasons Market, Bob's Red Mill and Rogue Creamery – because they understand the benefits to our entire community of improving our recycling system.

In a recent op-ed ("Recycling bill poses unnecessary expense for newspaper industry," June 16), the authors claim SB 582 would unfairly burden newspaper and magazine publishers. In fact, these companies can meet their obligation under this program by providing in-kind advertising services for public education on recycling and will likely be able to cover their share without paying much at all. Additionally, small businesses will be exempt and will not have any obligations.

The people of Oregon expect more from our recycling system than what they are getting today. We need producers to share responsibility with governments, ratepayers and the recycling industry to make sure recycling programs across the state operate responsibly and deliver the real benefits we know are possible. Recycling done well can protect the environment, human health, and our communities. Oregon can, and should, do better.