

Policy Ladder to the Circular Economy

Policymakers have a variety of policy tools to help build the circular economy. Unfortunately, these tools are sometimes presented as “either / or” propositions. But to reach our goal of a truly sustainable economy, we need all these policies and likely more. And we need to understand that they compound upon each other. In order of most impactful for the environment (from the top down), we’ve developed a ladder to envision the tools. Policy makers can start at any point on the ladder, but the goal should be to eventually enact all of them.



Reuse / Refill Targets

- Require business sectors that put single-use products and packaging into the waste stream to achieve increasing % transitions to reusable formats over time.
- Expand on deposits to require that a certain amount of beverages are sold in refillable containers; could apply to other sectors too.

Deposit Refund Systems (DRS or Bottle Bills)

- Financial incentives for customers to return containers for recycling predominantly, but also refill.
- Preserves value of materials.
- Currently focused on beverages, but could expand to other sectors.

Reusable Foodware Policy

- No single-use for on-site dining.
- No unwanted accessories for take-out and delivery.
- Charge for single-use cups + containers & investment in reuse service infrastructure.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

- Producers are accountable for meeting recycling targets, litter prevention & other measures.
- They raise funds through fees and invest in meeting targets by utilizing and expanding infrastructure; & outreach and education.

Single-use Packaging Bans

- Plastic bags, polystyrene foam.
- Straws, stirrers.
- Individual hotel toiletries, etc.

Good Solid Waste / Recycling Policy

- Universal cart-based curbside recycling.
- Statewide Pay-As-You-Throw.
- Landfill bans on recyclable materials.
- Modernized Material Recovery Facilities.
- Away-from-home collection/recycling.
- Outreach and education.