

BY THE NUMBERS:

# America's Recycling Challenge



America's recycling system is in crisis. The numbers show that, while fixing the broken system will be difficult, recycling must be saved.

## A RECYCLING SYSTEM IN CRISIS

10,000

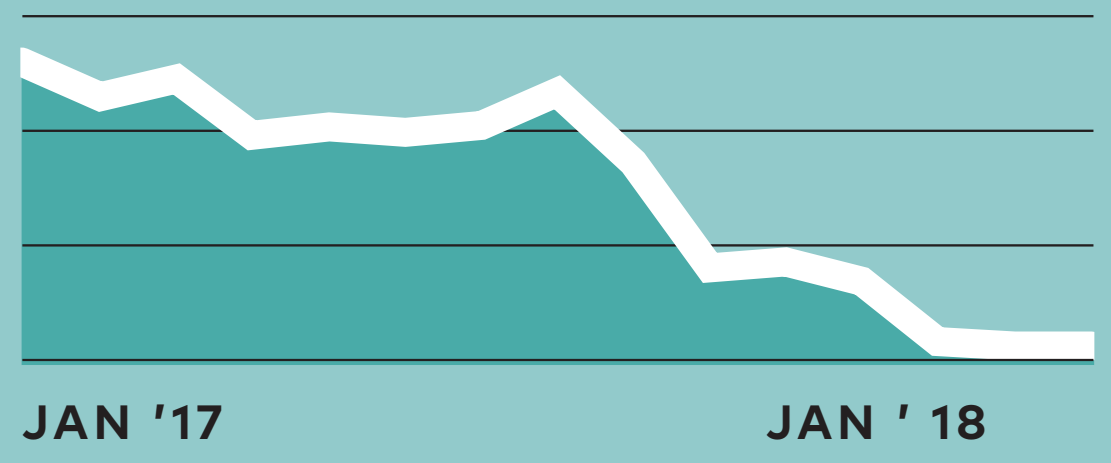
Recycling in America consists of nearly 10,000 individual systems, all with different rules about what is recyclable.<sup>1</sup>

86%

of Americans agree that the world is facing a plastic and packaging crisis.

When China implemented its "National Sword" policy in January 2018, effectively banning foreign waste, America's biggest customer for U.S. recyclables disappeared — exposing a U.S. recycling system badly in need of transformation.<sup>2</sup>

Mixed Paper & Plastic Exports Plummeted By More Than 90%



## WIDESPREAD CONSUMER CONFUSION

4%

Only 4% of Americans say they are not confused by recycling rules.

?



40% of Americans are aspirational recyclers, throwing items they are unsure about in the bin and hoping for the best.

92%

92% of Americans say they feel they know their local recycling rules, but fewer than six-in-ten report researching them.

## CONSEQUENCES OF A BROKEN RECYCLING SYSTEM

35%  
8%

America recycles only 35% of its overall waste — for plastic, just 8%.<sup>3</sup>

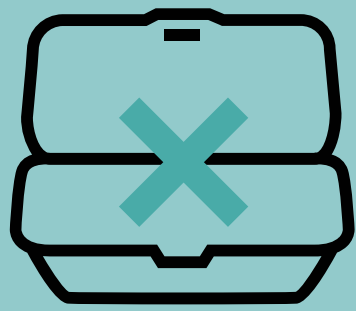
6%

The demand for recycled plastics is growing, as more companies make sustainability commitments — but the current supply of recycled plastics meets just 6% of demand.<sup>4</sup>



Americans who have experienced negative changes to curbside recycling programs are **more than twice as likely to give up recycling entirely if they found out their recyclables were being landfilled.**

## OPPORTUNITIES TO TRANSFORM RECYCLING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY



95% of Americans said they would change their behavior if they found out they were recycling the wrong way.



93% of Americans believe that national standards will alleviate recycling confusion.



77% believe the federal government should make tackling packaging waste the next "moon shot."

Learn more about Consumer Brands' vision to solve the recycling crisis.  
[consumerbrandsassociation.org/recycle](http://consumerbrandsassociation.org/recycle)

<sup>1</sup>Source: Environmental Protection Agency data.  
<sup>2</sup>Source: U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. International Trade Commission data via Solid Waste Association of North America.  
<sup>3</sup>Source: Environmental Protection Agency data.  
<sup>4</sup>Source: Environmental Protection Agency data via Closed Loop Partners.  
All other data in this graphic is from Consumer Brands Association's primary research.