

SB 5697: Modernizing Recycling in Washington with the RENEW Act

What is The RENEW Act?

The RENEW Act modernizes our recycling system by establishing an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program that requires companies that make consumer products to fund the recycling system and ensure that their packaging and paper products actually get recycled.

Why do we need the RENEW Act?

Recycling rates are down from where they were a decade ago. Today, less than half of consumer packaging and paper waste is recycled. Despite investments in recycling services by local governments and service providers, the state's recycling rate remains below 50%.

Figure 1: Washington Recovery Rates are Decreasing

The percentage of materials collected for recycling, composting, and other beneficial uses such as burning for energy.

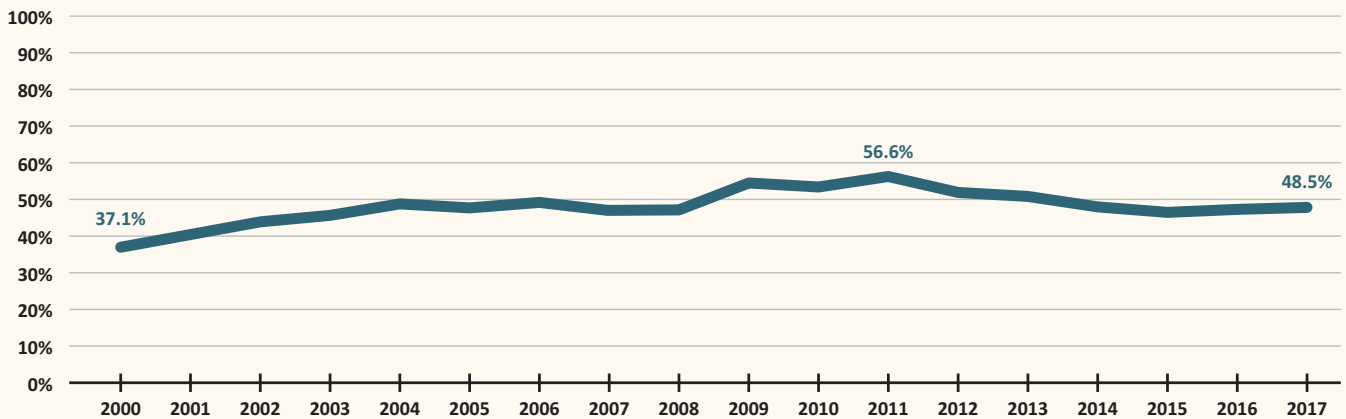
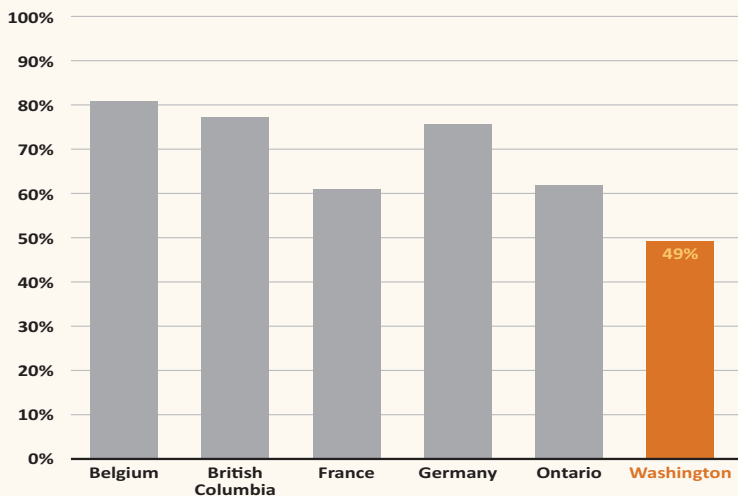


Figure 2: 2020 Residential Recycling Rates in Areas with EPR Compared to Washington



Source: Washington State Department of Ecology, "Successful Plastic Packaging Management Programs and Innovations" 2020, <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/2007025.pdf>

The recycling system has also become more challenging for local governments to operate due to a dramatic rise in the quantity and types of packaging in our waste stream. Additionally, in 2018, China and other countries restricted the import of recyclable materials from the U.S. These recent changes have made the system more expensive to run, leading to service cuts and/or increased costs for residents. Right now, 1 in 10 Washington households have no access to curbside recycling (see Figure 3 on next page).

As shown in Figure 2, countries with EPR programs in place have seen a significant increase in recycling and are achieving substantially higher residential recycling rates compared to Washington.



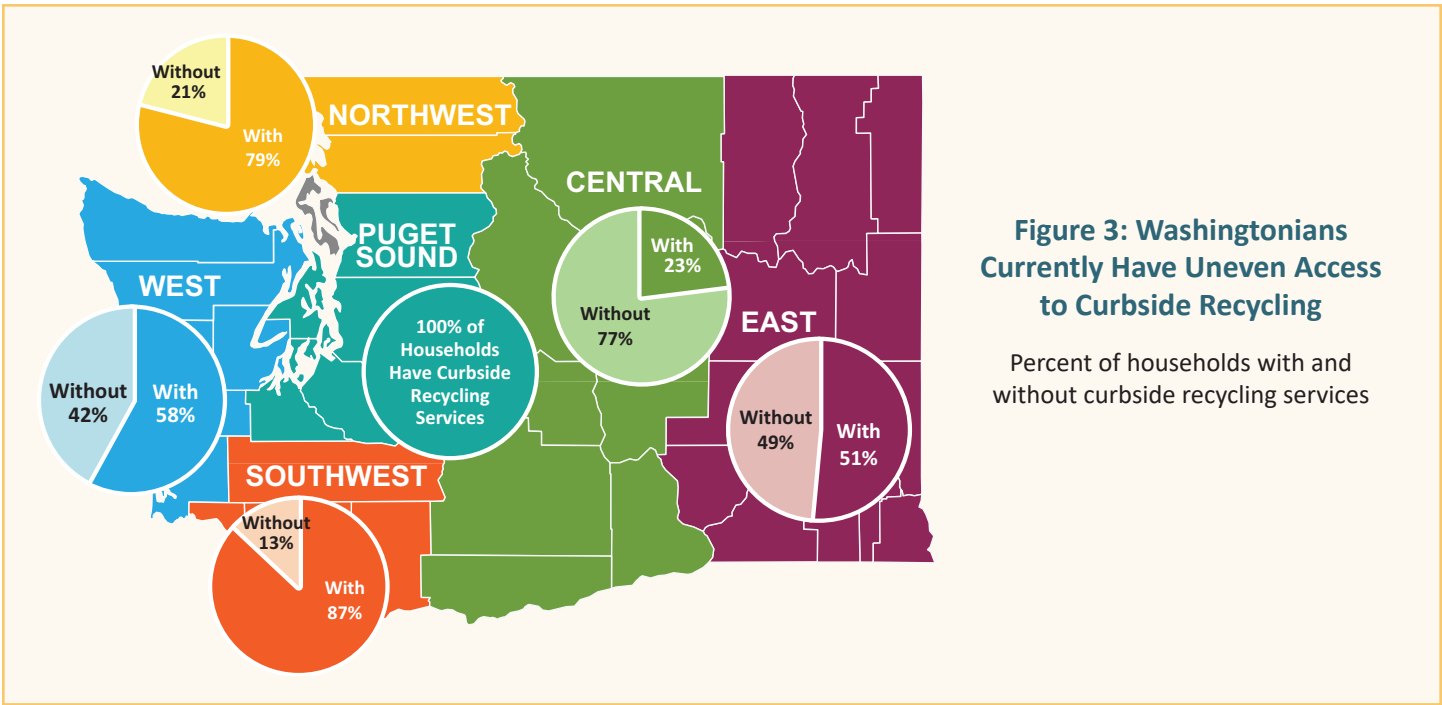


Figure 3: Washingtonians Currently Have Uneven Access to Curbside Recycling

Percent of households with and without curbside recycling services

Benefits of a modernized recycling system for Washington residents:

- Builds on **existing service and infrastructure** while investing in **improvements**.
- Creates and funds **consistent, multi-lingual, and culturally relevant recycling education**.
- Makes recycling simple with a **single statewide list of accepted recyclable items**.
- Creates **mandated recycling and reuse targets** for producers.
- Requires producers to **design reusable, recyclable, or compostable packaging** and meet environmental goals.
- Expands curbside **recycling to at least 360,000 households** that currently have no service.

Economic benefits:

- Fully funds recycling across the state to **reduce costs for local governments** and provide **convenient and consistent recycling service to residents at no cost**.
- Creates **over 1,650 additional green, local, living-wage jobs**.
- Saves Washington households **\$60 - \$300 per year on recycling service costs** and offers access to curbside recycling wherever curbside garbage service is available.

Environmental benefits:

- Recycles **212,000 additional tons of packaging and paper products** - an increase of 40%.
- Avoids an additional **565,000 MTCO₂e of greenhouse gas emissions annually** - equivalent to taking more than 297,000 vehicles off the road.
- Provides **transparency that collected materials are recycled responsibly** and only sent to end markets and countries that meet environmental, labor, health, and safety standards.