

## U.S. Plastics Pact PCR Certification Principles

### Introduction

The U.S. Plastics Pact (U.S. Pact) strives to build a circular economy for plastics in the United States. Keeping plastic in the value chain instead of the landfill is a primary component of a circular economy for plastics. For that reason, Target 4 of the [U.S. Pact Roadmap](#) requires Activators to commit to using Postconsumer Recycled (PCR) content in their packaging. PCR content in packaging keeps quality plastic in the value chain, reducing the need for virgin plastic production. In order to increase transparency around the use of PCR, the U.S. Pact recommends that Activators procure packaging made with certified PCR material.

Below are guidelines that Activators should use when evaluating PCR standards and certification options in order to maximize PCR's positive impact. The U.S. Pact recommends that these principles also be considered when choosing a post-industrial recycled (PIR) or recycled content certification program.

### Guidelines for Effective PCR Certifications

#### 1. Supports Ellen MacArthur Foundation

Be consistent with, and support, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF) [Global Commitment](#). A certification program should support the EMF Global Commitment for a New Plastics Economy by following its vision for a circular economy of plastics where plastic packaging is 100% reused, recycled, or composted, and PCR is increased while virgin plastic use is decreased.

#### 2. Compliance

Require compliance with relevant national and international laws and conventions. PCR certifications should comply with all regional, national, and international laws that they operate in, including indigenous community laws.

#### 3. Definitions

Standards should be consistent with ISO definitions for recycled materials: ISO 14021:2016 (E)

- **Postconsumer material** is material generated by households or by commercial, industrial, and institutional facilities in their role as end-users of the product which can no longer be used for its intended

purpose. This includes the return of materials from the distribution chain such as obsolete materials or damaged goods.

- **Preconsumer material** (also referred to as Post-Industrial) is material diverted from the waste stream during a manufacturing process that cannot be reclaimed within the same process that generated it. Excluded is reutilization of materials such as rework, regrind, or scrap generated in a process and capable of being reclaimed with the same process that generated it.

#### **4. Transparent Goals/Claims**

“Recycled content” goals and claims should provide detail on the amount that is postconsumer and the amount that is post-industrial. A sustained increase in demand for postconsumer materials is critical for facilitating the necessary investments in infrastructure to process postconsumer recycled materials. While this detail may not be feasible for on-pack claims, companies should be transparent in their corporate goals and corporate reports about the breakdown between postconsumer and post-industrial sources.

#### **5. Science-Based**

Standards should be developed and revised based on a scientific approach, taking into account the most recent scientific findings related to plastics recycling and the use of recycled materials.

#### **6. Adaptable**

Be adaptable to national/regional conditions and needs. Each PCR standard should take into account the operation’s unique cultural, political, legal, and geographic conditions in each region/nation.

#### **7. Consider Diverse Impacts**

Focus on minimizing or eliminating important environmental and/or social negative impacts while creating environmental, economic, and positive impacts. For example, products and packaging made with postconsumer recycled materials should be widely available to all consumers and the process of recycling should not negatively impact marginalized communities. Recycling processes should not increase greenhouse gas emissions (as compared to virgin plastic production) and toxic by-products should not be released into the environment.

#### **8. Equitable**

Require meaningful and equitable stakeholder participation considering social and environmental interest groups and provide means to have smaller

and vulnerable groups engaged in the process. Decision-making and procedures should be made by a diverse group of stakeholders, including relevant environmental and social groups. Matters should be decided by consensus or by balanced decision-making.<sup>1</sup> The PCR certifications should be consistent with the [U.S. Plastics Pact environmental justice definition](#) and values.

## **9. Transparency**

Provide transparency in decision-making and public reporting on its certification. Certification programs must have structured operations guidelines and procedures that are publicly available. All documentation should be easily accessible through a public website.

## **10. Third-party Independent Certification and Accreditation**

Require third-party independent certification and accreditation. Companies providing certification status must be independently verified by an appropriately accredited certification body. The certification program should have several certification bodies accredited to avoid perceived or real conflicts of interest.

## **11. Conflict Resolution**

Certification bodies should have accessible complaint and appeal mechanisms. There should be comprehensive measures to gather complaints and resolve conflicts at all levels of the certification program.

## **12. Continuous Improvement**

Be committed to continuous improvement. The certification standards must have periodic review assessments (at least every five years) that reflect lessons learned, recent scientific findings, and current legislation in the region/nation.

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<sup>1</sup> The decision-making process should balance economic, social and environmental considerations equitably in order to have a balanced interest from stakeholders — including the convening of stakeholders in both formal and informal manners.