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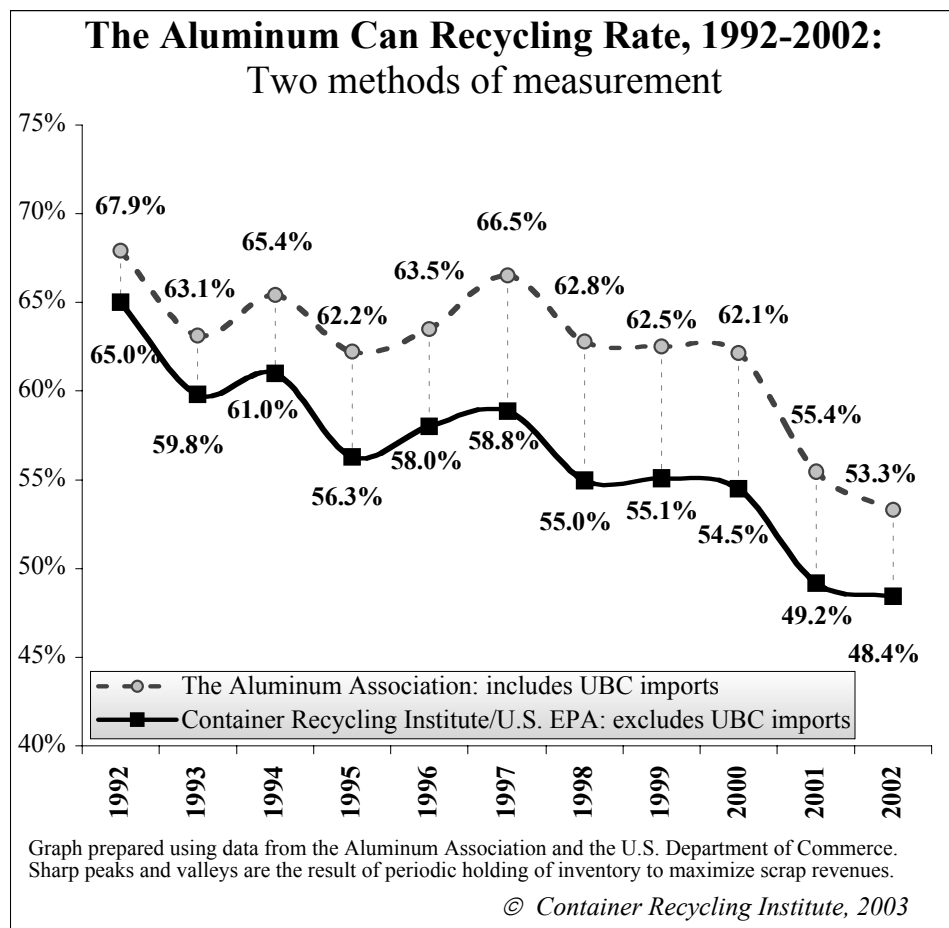
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## Aluminum Can Recycling Rate Drops for Fifth Year in a Row

The recycling rate for used aluminum beverage cans has sunk to its lowest point since 1980, according to the Container Recycling Institute, a non-profit organization that tracks beverage container sales and recycling trends nationwide.

On April 11th, 2003, the Aluminum Association, a Washington-based industry trade group, announced that the used beverage can recycling rate for the year 2002 was 53.4%. When this year's data are adjusted for the 5.3 billion imported scrap cans that were not originally sold in the United States, however, the actual *domestic* aluminum can recycling rate is only 48.4%. This is lower than last year's domestic recycling rate of 49.2% (or 55.4%, according to the Aluminum Association).

Whether one adheres to the Aluminum Association's measurement method or that of the Container Recycling Institute and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, there is no dispute that the U.S. used beverage can (UBC) recycling rate is in a sustained slide, as the graph shows. This is the fifth consecutive decline in the UBC recycling rate.



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When imported scrap cans are deducted from the equation, 51.6 billion cans were wasted in 2002, out of a total of 100 billion cans sold. Only 48.4 billion cans were recycled.

According to Jenny Gitlitz, research director for the Container Recycling Institute, the slipping beverage can recycling rate means that 39% more aluminum is being landfilled, incinerated, or littered now than a decade ago.

"We wasted 763,000 tons of cans last year," Gitlitz said, "—that was up from 550,000 tons wasted in 1992. Replacing these wasted cans with new cans made from virgin materials will waste the energy equivalent of 16.2 million barrels of crude oil, and will generate over 3 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions."

"The irony is that while Americans are trashing almost three quarters of a million tons of beverage cans a year," Gitlitz said, "the major aluminum companies are forging ahead with plans to build new aluminum smelters—and hydroelectric dams for power—in environmentally-sensitive areas including Brazil, Iceland, Malaysia and Mozambique."

According to Gitlitz, the dam in Iceland will supply Alcoa's new 322,000 ton smelter, and will submerge 22 square miles of tundra, including habitat for reindeer and the pink-footed goose, up to 60 waterfalls, and what has been called the Icelandic equivalent of the Grand Canyon.

In August 2002, aluminum industry leaders formed the Aluminum Can Council, with the stated aim of encouraging beverage can recycling, but the new group has not yet implemented any significant recycling collection or educational programs.

CRI executive director Pat Franklin said, "The aluminum industry's efforts to reverse the declining recycling rate have failed." Over the past five years, she said, the industry has collected cans to build Habitat for Humanity homes, for example. "These campaigns give the industry a lot of good publicity," she said, "but don't make a dent in the aluminum can recycling rate. They are a drop in the bucket." She called for container deposit systems, or bottle bills, to increase the container recycling rate nationwide.

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