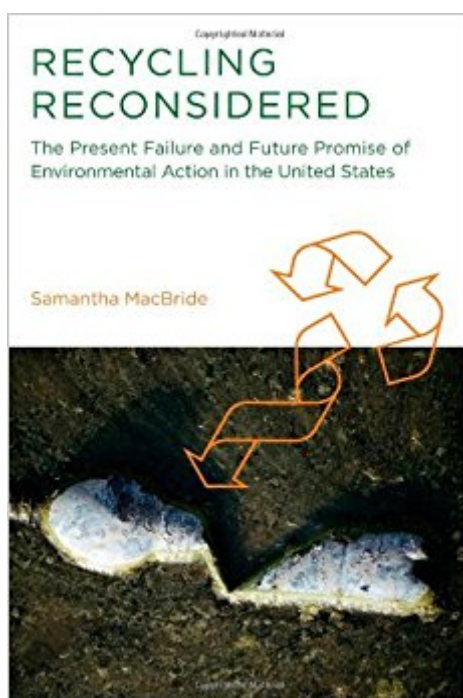


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# Recycling Reconsidered: The Present Failure And Future Promise Of Environmental Action In The United States (Urban And Industrial Environments)



## Synopsis

Recycling is widely celebrated as an environmental success story. The accomplishments of the recycling movement can be seen in municipal practice, a thriving private recycling industry, and widespread public support and participation. In the United States, more people recycle than vote. But, as Samantha MacBride points out in this book, the goals of recycling -- saving the earth (and trees), conserving resources, and greening the economy -- are still far from being realized. The vast majority of solid wastes are still burned or buried. MacBride argues that, since the emergence of the recycling movement in 1970, manufacturers of products that end up in waste have successfully prevented the implementation of more onerous, yet far more effective, forms of sustainable waste policy. Recycling as we know it today generates the illusion of progress while allowing industry to maintain the status quo and place responsibility on consumers and local government. MacBride offers a series of case studies in recycling that pose provocative questions about whether the current ways we deal with waste are really the best ways to bring about real sustainability and environmental justice. She does not aim to debunk or discourage recycling but to help us think beyond recycling as it is today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As the title implies, Samantha MacBride's *Recycling Reconsidered* takes a serious, timely, and unvarnished look at recycling in the United States. Her agenda is clearly utilitarian -- not to convince

us of the environmental virtues of recycling or to offer a cynical appraisal of why it doesn't work but to ask thoughtful questions and make reasonable suggestions well beyond the often trite assessments that regularly appear in print. You can argue with her conclusions, but you cannot dismiss her data, her careful analysis, and her no-nonsense approach. (Martin V. Melosi, author of *The Sanitary City*) By charting the waste cycle from curbside collector to the corporate polluter, MacBride reveals layer after layer of the recycling and waste management conundrum, building on and extending previous studies of American waste. In so doing, she has widened our understanding of a very complex issue for contemporary society. For this MacBride should be commended, and *Recycling Reconsidered* should be added to all relevant readings lists in environmental sociology, contemporary anthropology, social geography, and urban planning. (Dr. Liam Leonard, Lecturer in Sociology, Criminology and Human Rights, Institute of Technology, Sligo, Ireland)

Samantha MacBride has produced an outstanding study that asks profound sociological questions about the way our recycling systems are organized. Her concept of 'busy-ness' is right on target: consumers, environmentalists, and governments are busy recycling and feeling good while the waste industry pursues profits, and the ultimate goals of sustainability and equity get lost in the shuffle. She demonstrates that the recycling movement itself is a big part of the problem, having never made it a priority to regulate, monitor, and focus on manufacturers' waste, and blindly embracing the consumer as the center of a "can-do" ideology, to the neglect of troubling ecological and market realities. Drawing on her years of experience as a recycling professional, MacBride outlines bold and sensible policy recommendations for a just and sustainable recycling system and the broader materials economy. This book is a must-read for scholars, activists, and policy makers. (David Naguib Pellow, Don Martindale Professor of Sociology, University of Minnesota and author of *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago*)

With a thoughtful and critical eye, this study deconstructs municipal recycling, sorting the valuable aspects from those that just 'feel good' and reveals the strategic tensions that arise when a social movement, the 'zero waste' recycling movement, aligns with a business sector, the recycling industry. With a comfortable mix of technical description, financial analysis and good story telling the book challenges the simple notions of glass and plastic recycling and 'shared product responsibility'. Recognizing the important role that private enterprise can play in reuse, recycling and composting, this book concludes that good government policy remains a critical force in driving a sustainable materials economy. (Ken Geiser, Professor of Work Environment, Director, Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, University of Massachusetts, Lowell)

MacBride provides an excellent historical overview of the U.S. recycling efforts, their limitations and the opportunities to improve recycling determinations in the

future. This work is of great value to increasing our understanding of the current limitations of recycling efforts and changing policies and perceptions to make recycling more effective in the future. (Electronic Green Journal)

Samantha MacBride teaches at Columbia University's School of Public and International Affairs and is a professional in local waste governance.

Excellent research on role of recycling ideologies and how they may be deflecting citizen activism from more effective activities targeting industrial waste, legislation, regulation, and bio wastes.

I loaded this onto my Kindle and the text did not flow correctly. Words at the end of each line were cut off. Never encountered this with a Kindle book on my device.

Lots of good information.

The waste/recycling world has a lot of informative journal/magazine publications, but it can be hard to find an entire book dedicated to the industry and its achievements. This book looks at landfill diversion and employment statistics, policy successes and failures, and ties these in with the wavering history of public opinion toward waste, recycling, and materials management - all in a United States context. This is a ton of information, so reading and processing it took a while, but was well worth it. I came away from the book with a more concrete idea of what it will take - in tons, technology, and policy - to ACTUALLY move toward zero waste. For example, MacBride presents astonishing evidence for how little attention is paid to industrial waste tonnages in the overall scheme of materials management policy. I know personally that the materials management industry is already aware of this problem and moving to change, but MacBride provides the numbers and history behind how the problem developed in the first place - very interesting. Some of the status quo recycling programs that we know and love have reached a point of diminishing returns, so it's time we turn to a hard-hitting mix of policies and market drivers that can properly handle the crazy assortment of materials that flow out of the homes and businesses in this country. MacBride lays out a policy framework for doing just that. Though my day-to-day work is at the community scale, *Recycling Reconsidered* has me thinking more intelligently about long-term impacts and scalability of zero waste initiatives.

This book answered many questions I had about recycling, such as why we can't recycle Styrofoam or plastic bags (too light to be profitable and difficult to process dirty). It also gives a history of urban waste disposal and recycling in America, explaining what went right and how corporations looking out for their interests hinder the process. Finally, it presents well-researched and thoughtful proposed solutions to our waste issues.

It has some useful information in it, but it is written in such a way that is hard to understand. The sentences are very long and hard to follow, making the information unclear and difficult to understand.

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