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U.S. RECYCLERS INCREASING DOMESTIC INVESTMENTS AND RESPONDING TO CHINA’S EXPORT POLICY

WASHINGTON (November 14, 2019)—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today released its Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2017 Facts and Figures Fact Sheet, which provides information on recycling and recovery rates, among other things, for calendar years 2016 and 2017. The American Chemistry Council responded to the report with the following statement, which may be attributed to Steve Russell, vice president of ACC’s Plastics Division:

“America’s plastics makers are deeply committed to increasing plastics reuse, recycling and recovery, and we’re not surprised with the recent decline given the widespread impacts of China’s “National Sword” policy, which has curtailed Asian markets for U.S. recyclers. At the same time, we’re heartened that one consequence of China’s policy has been a wave of new announcements and investments in domestic recycling here in the United States.

These announcements are coming from across the value chain, from plastics makers and consumer brand companies, to traditional and advanced recyclers, which are adapting quickly and decisively to the new landscape. Data show that domestic markets for recycled plastics are increasing, and we expect this trend to accelerate.

Companies are partnering to design waste out of our systems and increase circularity through new product and packaging formats, technology innovation, and new business models that treat used plastics as a resource – or raw material – for sustainable manufacturing. Communities are investing in new systems and equipment to improve collection and sortation. And plastics producers have set goals intended to make all plastic packaging recyclable or recoverable by 2030 and recycled or recovered by 2040. These efforts to expand and enhance both traditional and advanced recycling are fundamentally transforming plastics use into more circular systems with a broader range of outputs and markets than ever before.

We all have a role to play, since recycling and recovery begins with collection, and we need everyone to continue to participate in their local recycling programs. While the opportunities to transform our waste into something of value have never been greater, consumers are being bombarded with conflicting messages about recycling. Our message is: don’t stop. Check with
your local program to confirm what items your community collects, and strengthen your commitment to get the right items into the bin.” (See our plastics recycling tips here.)

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The American Chemistry Council (ACC) represents the leading companies engaged in the business of chemistry. ACC members apply the science of chemistry to make innovative products and services that make people’s lives better, healthier and safer. ACC is committed to improved environmental, health and safety performance through Responsible Care®; common sense advocacy designed to address major public policy issues; and health and environmental research and product testing. The business of chemistry is a $553 billion enterprise and a key element of the nation’s economy. It is among the largest exporters in the nation, accounting for ten percent of all U.S. goods exports. Chemistry companies are among the largest investors in research and development. Safety and security have always been primary concerns of ACC members, and they have intensified their efforts, working closely with government agencies to improve security and to defend against any threat to the nation’s critical infrastructure.