



Recycled Materials
Association

March 19, 2026

The Honorable Jamieson Greer
United States Trade Representative
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20508

Submitted Online

RE: Request for Comments on the Design of a Plurilateral Agreement on Trade in Critical Minerals and Policy Actions To Strengthen the Resilience of Critical Mineral Supply Chains (Docket USTR-2026-0034)

Dear Ambassador Greer:

The Recycled Materials Association (ReMA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the design of a plurilateral agreement on trade in critical minerals.

ReMA supports the Administration’s goal of strengthening resilient and secure critical mineral supply chains, and emphasizes that recycled critical mineral inputs—particularly aluminum and copper scrap—must be treated distinctly from primary minerals. To that end, ReMA urges the Administration to ensure that any plurilateral agreement emerging from this process expressly protects trade in recycled inputs by requiring members to: (1) prohibit export restrictions on critical mineral scrap materials; and (2) neither maintain nor adopt import restrictions or discriminatory regulatory provisions on critical mineral scrap materials.

I. Overview of U.S. Recycled Materials Industry

ReMA represents more than 1,700 companies in the recycled materials industry. ReMA members process, broker, and consume end of life materials—including metals, such as steel, copper, nickel, and aluminum, as well as paper, plastics, glass, textiles, rubber, electronics, and batteries—derived from diverse commercial, industrial and residential sources across the country. ReMA is also the largest trade association representing predominantly small- and medium-sized recycling companies that operate over 4,000 locations across the U.S. and the world. Our industry supplies high-quality manufacturing inputs for everything from essential infrastructure, like bridges and buildings, to consumer products that Americans rely on every day, like laptops, soda cans, boxes, and cars.

ReMA members provide U.S. manufacturers with a reliable source of inputs, which help to make Made in the USA-products possible. The U.S. recycled materials industry supports nearly 600,000 good paying U.S. jobs and generates \$170 billion in total

economic activity annually. On average, approximately seventy percent of recycled materials processed within the United States are consumed domestically, with remaining material exported into the global manufacturing supply chain, largely due to limited domestic consuming capacity for certain grades and volumes.

Each year, through continuous innovation and efficiency increases, U.S. recycling output exceeds domestic manufacturing demand. Export of recycled materials are thus essential to our members' businesses and industry's competitiveness, as the export market serves as a relief valve for materials not consumed by U.S. manufacturers. Exports of recycled materials also reduce the U.S. trade deficit by nearly \$20 billion each year, sustain U.S. jobs, and safeguard the domestic capacity required to deliver high-quality recycled inputs to American manufacturers.

II. The Critical Minerals Scrap Market is Distinct from the Primary Metals Market

For purposes of this submission, "critical minerals" refers to those minerals designated by the U.S. Geological Survey in the *Federal Register* at 90 Fed. Reg. 50494. While ReMA refers to the materials processed by recyclers predominantly as "recycled materials," for the purposes of this submission, "scrap" refers to valuable materials derived from end-of-life products and post-industrial materials rather than primary extraction or refining. Certain forms of scrap metals may be considered critical minerals if they contain minerals appearing on the U.S. Geological Survey's critical minerals list. This overlap includes, but is not limited to, aluminum and copper scrap, alongside titanium, palladium, platinum, rhodium, as well as lithium, cobalt, and nickel, which are critical for battery productions, and neodymium, praseodymium, dysprosium, and terbium, which are needed for magnet manufacturing. We use the term "critical minerals scrap" to refer to these materials.

Understanding how recycled materials are generated is essential to evaluating policies affecting critical mineral supply chains. Recycling involves the processing of complex, end-of-life products—including vehicles, appliances, and other durable goods—that yield multiple recycled material streams, including both critical mineral scrap, such as copper, nickel, and aluminum, and non-critical materials, such as steel. As a result, measures that impede the recycling or trade of any one of these materials can have broader adverse effects on recycling operations and the availability of multiple recycled inputs, including critical mineral scrap. Policies designed to address critical mineral supply chains necessarily implicate trade in critical mineral scrap and must account for the distinct market dynamics of these important materials.

Critical minerals scrap differs from primary minerals in origin, price, quality variability, logistics, and environmental profiles. Scrap originates from products and materials that have reached useful end of life or from post-industrial residuals and is marketed and contracted at various grade levels to meet consumer needs. By contrast, primary inputs originate in extraction and ore processing and are subject to different cost structures and inventory practices. The uniqueness of the two markets means that each requires its own policy approach.

Critical mineral scrap pricing and grade variability differ from primary markets. Scrap follows more traditional market pricing and is less susceptible to the sharp swings that speculation and stockpiling can cause in primary markets. Scrap metal prices tend to reflect open-market supply-demand balances, whereas recent episodes in primary metals markets—such as the 2022 nickel trading disruption—show how non-fundamental financial factors can drive primary price volatility. Inventory practices also diverge. Recycling is a high-volume, low-margin business that relies on rapid turnover for risk management and cash flow, while primary producers can carry larger inventories or stockpiles to manage output and price swings. Attempts to apply primary-sector price-setting or inventory manipulation to scrap markets fail to account for these market and operational differences. Applying primary market-oriented price floors or border charges to scrap would further distort pricing by treating fundamentally different markets as the same. Therefore, any critical minerals agreement should contain a full carve-out for scrap.

China's participation in primary and scrap critical mineral markets illustrates how differently China operates. Over the past decade, the global scrap market has evolved rapidly as quality standards tightened and trade flows diversified to other markets. This history clarifies China's role in the market. In primary critical minerals, China's state-directed policies, export controls, and market interventions have concentrated refining and processing capacity and contributed to price volatility that is disconnected from physical fundamentals. In scrap, by contrast, China sharply curtailed imports beginning in the mid-2010s through successive tightening of contamination thresholds and reclassifications, which has reduced China's role as a key destination for U.S. scrap. Today, China is no longer the dominant buyer of U.S. aluminum or copper scrap that it once was.

Any plurilateral agreement should address primary-market manipulation where it occurs while avoiding measures that would unnecessarily restrict legitimate scrap trade that primarily serves allied markets and supports U.S. jobs and investment.

III. Export Controls on Critical Minerals Scrap Materials Will Reduce the Domestic Availability of These Products

U.S. recyclers generate substantial volumes of recycled materials—including critical mineral scrap materials—that domestic consuming facilities do not fully utilize, in significant part due to insufficient investment in the technologies and capacity needed to process and consume available recycled inputs at scale.

Maintaining current levels of scrap materials processing will be fundamental to supporting future expansion of steel and aluminum production in the United States. U.S. recyclers therefore require access to export markets to offtake recycled materials that are not purchased domestically, ensuring continued investment in collection and processing infrastructure while maintaining the capacity needed to supply U.S. manufacturers as domestic demand and technological capability expand. Without export markets as a relief valve, U.S. recyclers could not economically produce critical mineral scrap materials at current levels.

When U.S. steel and aluminum production capacity increases, which is a main objective of Section 232 tariffs, recycled scrap materials currently exported will instead be available to contribute as feedstocks for increased U.S. steel and aluminum production. Restricting scrap exports will discourage investment in collection and processing infrastructure by U.S. recyclers, ultimately reducing the supply chain resilience the plurilateral agreement seeks to build.

U.S. recyclers are eager to satisfy growing domestic demand for critical minerals scrap materials, consistent with Trump administration objectives. This includes copper and aluminum scrap, as well as nickel scrap, which is a key alloy for stainless steel production. When domestic demand strengthened in 2025 for high-value aluminum scrap such as used beverage containers (UBCs), U.S. exports of that scrap material fell by more than forty percent, as more material was allocated to U.S. manufacturers. As more U.S. steel and aluminum production comes online, U.S. recyclers will meet that demand for critical minerals input – they require no further incentive than market dynamics to meet this demand. A recent report from MM Markets indicates that domestic supply of aluminum scrap will exceed demand for the next fifteen years, even accounting for increased domestic production capacity.

Recyclers typically handle a diverse stream of material inputs and rely on market access for all types of scrap materials generated from complex products. For example, when an automobile is shredded, recyclers process different metals and materials for various end-markets. The steel is readily separated and typically shipped to domestic buyers, while the shredded non-ferrous metals, including a high percentage of aluminum scrap, generally can be sold domestically, but is not always in high market demand, resulting in the need for export. Additionally, batteries are separated and pre-processed, manufacturing black mass and swarf to be repurposed back into critical mineral supply chains. Limiting outlets for any one of these streams would disrupt this balanced, highly intricate system, which would undermine facility margins, and reduce overall scrap recovery across metals.

Restrictions on scrap exports would impose significant economic costs without advancing national security. Trade data indicate that U.S. scrap exports predominantly serve aligned partners, with shipments to China receiving a negligible amount of most higher-grade scrap materials, such as aluminum. Any framework that emerges from this process should expressly exempt critical mineral scrap materials from export controls or other restrictive border measures, and instead focus on incentives to encourage investments in refining capabilities.

IV. Discipline Restrictive Foreign Practices Affecting Scrap Flows

Members of the plurilateral agreement should commit to neither maintain nor adopt foreign export bans, opaque licensing requirements, dual pricing, and discriminatory technical rules that constrain legitimate trade in critical minerals scrap materials. To combat regulatory arbitrage, the agreement should identify and address gaps where foreign environmental or labor standards fall short of U.S. benchmarks that disadvantage compliant U.S. scrap, and it should admit new members only when those members align their standards accordingly.

To make these disciplines effective in practice, the agreement should require that technical rules be published in advance, be open to public input, and be designed as the least trade-restrictive means to achieve legitimate environmental, health, and safety objectives, with mutual recognition of functionally equivalent approaches. Obligations to administer measures in an impartial and reasonable manner, coupled with time-bound consultations and remedial pathways, would provide workable recourse where measures impair legitimate trade. This approach would prevent discriminatory practices while preserving the market-based flows that enable recyclers to invest in capacity expansion to ensure available supplies of critical mineral scrap materials for U.S. manufacturers.

V. Conclusion

Protecting and promoting trade in recycled inputs—including aluminum, nickel, and copper scrap—is essential to critical mineral supply chain resilience and national security. Any plurilateral agreement must recognize critical mineral scrap material as distinct from primary critical minerals. Furthermore, and in light of the unique market dynamics for critical mineral scrap materials, a plurilateral agreement should prohibit export and import restrictions on critical mineral scrap material and generally protect open trade of scrap materials worldwide. This approach would promote investment in domestic critical mineral scrap production, allow recyclers to prioritize domestic consumers while using exports as a relief valve for grades and volumes that exceed U.S. demand, support high-quality American jobs, and ensure availability of critical mineral scrap materials in the United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide valuable feedback as part of this important initiative. ReMA members applaud the Trump Administration for taking bold action to secure critical mineral supply chains.

Sincerely,



Robin K. Wiener
President
Recycled Materials Association