



MSW Solutions

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The Emergence of Regional and Local Product Stewardship Programs

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In 2001, SWANA issued a technical policy on product stewardship[1]. The purpose of that policy was to establish guiding principles for SWANA and its members to use in developing programs to safely and cost-effectively manage products at the end of their useful life. To achieve that result, product stewardship efforts should aim to encourage product manufacturers to take increasing responsibility to reduce the adverse environmental impacts of their products and packaging through improved product design and end-of-life management of the products they produce. In that policy, SWANA committed to promote product stewardship in an advocacy role as a voice for its members in the solid waste management profession.

Since that time SWANA has featured product stewardship in its various educational programs. Product stewardship efforts in Canada have been around for several years with the British Columbia product stewardship program dating back to 1992. However, in the last year we observed the start of product stewardship or producer responsibility programs in several states in the U.S.

A number of state-level organizations are drafting generic or framework legislation that would give state agencies the authority to establish product stewardship requirements for various classes of products. One goal of these efforts is to shift the product waste management system from one focused on government funded and ratepayer financed waste disposal to one that relies on producer responsibility. The intent of this is to reduce public costs, increase accessibility to services, attain higher environmental benefits and drive improvements in product design that promote environmental sustainability.

SWANA will continue to track these efforts and report on them in the educational programs for our members. Below I have provided a summary and references to some notable product stewardship efforts in the Canada and the U.S. including a description of two non-governmental organizations that promote this concept.

Product Stewardship in British Columbia, Canada. The first product stewardship program in British Columbia started in 1992 and required that all sellers of oil take back used oil, at no charge to the consumer (<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/recycling>.) In 1994 the province required producers and consumers of consumer paints to take responsibility for management of their wastes and provide consumers with a safe and convenient method to manage unwanted and waste paints. In 1997 producers of solvents, flammable liquids, domestic pesticides, gasoline and pharmaceuticals were required to take responsibility for the management of their wastes and establish a province-wide depot network. Also in 1997 the province required all beverage producers to establish a province-wide return collection system for beverage containers under a deposit-refund system. The regulation established the goal of a minimum 85 percent recovery rate and required that redeemed containers be either refilled or recycled.

In 2002 the province created its Industry Product Stewardship Business Plan, which established the framework for existing and new stewardship programs. This regulation completed the shift to results-based, extended producer responsibility. In 2006, the electronics product category and tire

product category were added to recycling regulation.

In 2007 the Ministry of Environment released the list of candidate products being considered for addition to the recycling regulation including: antifreeze and hydraulic fluid, batteries (alkaline, lithium, lead acid), mercury containing products, white goods (refrigerators, stoves, etc.), pool and photographic chemicals, furniture and textiles, construction and demolition waste, and automobiles.

Waste Diversion in Ontario, Canada. Waste Diversion Ontario (WDO) is non-government corporation created in 2002 (<http://www.wdo.ca>.) WDO was established to develop, implement and operate programs to divert wastes from landfills for a wide range of designated waste materials. Blue box waste (waste news and containers), used tires and used oil have been designated by the Minister of the Environment. Possible future designated materials include waste electronic and electrical equipment, special waste, organic materials, pharmaceuticals and fluorescent tubes. WDO has been authorized to work co-operatively with those industries that produce and distribute designated to establish diversion programs. WDO discharges this responsibility in co-operation with Industry Funding Organizations established under the Act.

The year 2007 marked the fourth anniversary of the adoption of the Blue Box Program which has achieved 63% diversion of blue box waste and distributed over \$200 million to municipalities to support recycling of printed papers and packaging. In 2007, WDO started a diversion program for waste electronics and electrical equipment, and in 2008 residents will have access to take-back facilities for computers, monitors, printers, fax machines and televisions.

The State of Minnesota. In 1999 the state of Minnesota was the first U.S. state to adopt a product stewardship policy (<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/oea/stewardship/policy.cfm>.) The state has chosen to pursue the product stewardship objectives largely through voluntary efforts. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is working with the Minnesota Legislature, state agencies and other stakeholders to promote the development of product stewardship policies. In 2001, Minnesota participated in an effort with the carpet industry to develop the first national product stewardship agreement in the U.S. The agency is developing partnerships with manufacturers, retail stores and local governments to test various product stewardship models for used consumer electronics. The Agency is working with government procurement agencies and large commercial entities to incorporate products stewardship into their purchasing specifications.

The Northwest Product Stewardship Council (NSPSC). The NWPSC is a coalition of governmental organizations in Washington and Oregon whose mission is to work together to integrate product stewardship principles into the policy and economic structures of the Pacific Northwest (<http://www.productstewardship.net>.) The Council is working to shift Washington and Oregon's product waste management system from one focused on government funded and ratepayer financed waste disposal to one that relies on producer responsibility in order to reduce public costs, increase accessibility to services, attain higher environmental benefits and drive improvements in product design that promote environmental sustainability.

The Council is guided by a Steering Committee comprised of representatives of government agencies that provide funding and staff time to NWPSC. As of May 2008 12 cities and counties in Washington and Oregon were represented on the Committee. The Council is developing regional product stewardship programs for electronics, mercury containing products, paints, packaging and beverage containers, pharmaceuticals, tires and chemical products.

The California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC). The California Product Stewardship Council is an organization of local governments in California who aim to shift California's product waste management system from one focused on government funding to one that relies on producer responsibility (www.caproductstewardship.org.) Started in 2007, CPSC has participation from 27 counties, 31 cities and 14 local government associations in the state of California. CPSC will focus efforts on implementing regulations and programs that move towards manufacturers taking full responsibility for their products at end of life, including programs that employ a phased approach with ever increasing responsibility for products over a period of time.

The Product Stewardship Institute (PSI). PSI is a national non-profit membership-based organization located in Boston, Massachusetts (<http://www.productstewardship.us>.) PSI works with state and local government agencies to partner with manufacturers, retailers, environmental groups, federal agencies, and other key stakeholders to reduce the health and environmental impacts of consumer products. PSI takes a unique product stewardship approach to solving waste management problems by encouraging product design changes and mediating stakeholder dialogues.

The Product Policy Institute. The Product Policy Institute is in the exploratory phase of an independent, not-for-profit research and communication institute that will promote ecological product policy (<http://www.productpolicy.org>.) Its goal is to bring the complex issues, fundamental to sustainable production and consumption, to a broad audience of media, decision-makers, educators, activists and the general public. Various non-governmental organizations and academic institutions are working on pieces of the agenda including producer responsibility, ending virgin material and disposal subsidies, ecological tax shifting, eco-labeling and green procurement. The project will commission original research and collaborate with researchers in existing organizations.

As more states and provinces consider product stewardship programs, SWANA believes that all participants in a product life-cycle including retailers, consumers and waste managers have important roles to play in cooperating with product designers and producers to develop the most workable and cost effective programs. Governments should provide leadership in promoting the practices of product stewardship through procurement and market development and where necessary provide regulatory incentives, disincentives and restrictions. Ultimately, the costs of product collection, reuse, recycling and disposal should be minimized to the greatest extent possible for local, provincial and state governments and shifted to the manufacturers and consumers of products.

[1] Technical Policy 2.1 Product Stewardship has been posted on the SWANA web site (<http://www.swana.org>) under Technical Divisions/Technical Policies.
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