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Financial Relief in Sight for Local Governments

Extended Producer Responsibility Fixes Today's Waste Management System

A swift movement is headed toward California, and it's called Product Stewardship or Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). It's a simple policy approach where everyone associated with waste takes a portion of the responsibility for it, starting with the producers who design the products and packaging in the first place. Before we can understand where this freight train is headed, we must first understand where we are today and why the current waste management system is not working.

The Disconnect Between Production and Disposal

We currently operate under two completely separate and disconnected systems: one system designs, manufactures and sells products to us and then effectively rides off into the sunset with the profits. Once the consumer is done with those products, the other system is engaged when local governments — and their taxpayers — become financially responsible for managing the disposal of these private goods, many of which are toxic and disposable by design. These two systems do not communicate with each other. Local governments do not have any input into how toxic or durable the products are made, and manufacturers have little incentive to design creative and safe ways to dispose of them at the end of their useful life.

The Waste Stream is Changing

A century ago, when local governments assumed responsibility for solid waste, it consisted mostly of coal ash left over from heating and cooking. The rest was mainly food, with a small amount of simple manufactured products like paper and glass. Today, manufactured products and associated packaging make up 75-percent of what we throw away.

Hundreds of products make our lives easier... until we don't need them anymore. Then, if they are not disposed of responsibly, the acids, mercury and other heavy metals they contain become a danger to our health and the environment.

Most of the companies who design and sell these products are not paying to dispose of them and actually design their products for disposal. State disposal bans do nothing to reduce the toxicity or total volume of waste. Recycling efforts have grown by leaps and bounds, but recycling efforts alone cannot reduce the tons of waste *produced* and *disposed* in California annually. Although recycling has increased exponentially, waste disposal has not changed much since 1990 — approximately 42-million tons each year. How can this be, given the exponential growth of recycling programs? The answer is in production. The explosive growth of product waste in the last twenty years is fueling the disparity between waste diversion efforts and landfill disposal. Local governments and their rate payers continue to foot the bill for costly disposal programs. It is time to change that.

Local Governments Cannot Afford to Comply with California Waste Bans

As more and more products are deemed "hazardous," the state's response

is to ban them from landfill disposal. Products banned from disposal include arsenic-treated lumber, hypodermic needles and Universal wastes. Universal wastes are products that are so “universally” used, like batteries and fluorescent lamps, that they have their own category. These Universal wastes were banned from disposal in household trash in 2006. Treated lumber was banned in 2007, and needles and other “sharps” were banned in September 2008. Pharmaceuticals are expected to be banned soon.

Unfortunately, the state-mandated bans must be enforced by local governments that do not have the money or resources to manage such a lofty task. Local governments in California spend more than \$100-million a year collecting and properly managing household hazardous waste alone. It is the classic unfunded mandate — a government directive without the resources to enforce it. The intentions are good, but the responsibility is misplaced onto local governments with no funding. We call this a “Ban without a Plan.”

The Solution: Extended Producer Responsibility

The California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC), is a non-profit organization comprised of local government associates, working closely with business partners including producers, retailers, waste haulers and recycling companies, other non-profits, environmental health organizations and consumers - all working together to reduce waste and bring good public policy to the materials management industry.

CPSC is working towards Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies in California. EPR is a policy approach that shifts waste management costs and responsibilities from being a taxpayer and ratepayer responsibility to one of shared responsibility among producers, retailers, consumers and local government. And producers, having the greatest ability to influence greener, healthier product design, have the greatest amount of responsibility. The goal is to provide incentives for manufacturers to design products that are more durable, less toxic and create less waste, and to create, fund and manage programs to “take-back” their products for recycling and reuse.

EPR policy creates a level playing field for producers and gives consumers comparable choices. We are not re-inventing the wheel. The solution is at hand. It can be done – similar programs have long been the standard in Europe, Canada and other countries. CPSC suggests that California is ready for this change.

Get Involved

The CPSC is looking for more product stewards to expand the message of EPR. It is easy to advocate support as an individual, business, non-profit organization or government agency. Local Governments should unite to let our elected officials know that there is broad-based support for EPR. It is simple to become a part of the EPR movement in California: Join CPSC as a Local Government Associate. Sign a Pledge of Support. Encourage your City Council or Board of Supervisors to adopt a resolution in support of EPR and modify environmental planning documents (i.e., Purchasing Policies, Zero Waste Plans, etc) to include EPR. Stay informed and involved by joining one of CPSC's e-mail list servs. Add EPR advocacy to whatever lobbying activities your City or County is already undertaking in Sacramento. Contribute to CPSC. Your help is needed to push through to a victory for EPR in California. To learn more or to become part of this movement, visit the California Product Stewardship Council's website at www.CalPSC.org.

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