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Products and Packaging Contribute 44 Percent of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions

By *Bill*

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Product policy change can combat global warming, groups say

WASHINGTON DC (September 18, 2009) -- The garbage filling our trashcans is also changing our global climate, according to complimentary reports released today by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Product Policy Institute (PPI).

Two New Reports

- The **EPA Report** reveals that **37 percent of United States total greenhouse gas emissions result from the provision and use of goods produced within the U.S.** "Goods" includes all consumer products and packaging, including building components and passenger vehicles. "Provision and use" includes all activities from resource extraction, manufacturing, and transport to use and disposal. These emissions have a dangerous impact on the Earth's climate.
- A supplemental **white paper, released by PPI** and written by the lead technical author of the EPA report, tells an even more surprising story. When emissions of **products made abroad and consumed here are included, and exports are subtracted, products and packaging account for 44 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.** The PPI report adds the full global impact to the data published in the EPA report.

"Climate action has largely focused on transportation, heating and cooling, and food. **Now we know that reducing waste offers the largest opportunity to combat global warming,**" said **Bill Sheehan**, PPI executive director.

Joshuah Stolaroff, author of the white paper and technical lead on the EPA report, emphasized the importance of improving product design to address climate change. "Because product design influences all stages of the product life cycle, improving product design has the most potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with products," said Stolaroff in the PPI report. He was the AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow at U.S. EPA Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response.

Product Policy Response

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), or Product Stewardship, policies make brand-owners take financial ownership of their products, from creation to disposal. EPR reduces waste – and in so doing, reduces greenhouse gas emissions -- by giving producers a financial incentive to design products that close the loop by being easy to repair, reuse, and recycle, according to PPI. EPR policies require brand owners to pay for the reuse and recycling of their products.

EPR is a well-established policy in Canada, Europe, Japan, and South Korea. In this country, 18 states and New York City have passed EPR laws requiring brand-owners to pay for collecting, processing, reusing and recycling discarded electronic products sold in these jurisdictions. Environmental organizations are also promoting EPR. In 2008, the Sierra Club adopted a Zero Waste policy featuring EPR and recently created a Zero Waste Team whose top responsibility is advancing EPR policies.

The EPR policy approach addresses one of the key findings of the EPA report, "Opportunities to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Materials and Land Management Practice." The report states that **impacts during the production phase – activities from materials extraction to manufacturing -- are responsible for by far the largest portion of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions** from products and packaging.

"These reports prove that implementing product stewardship programs in the U.S. will result in the greatest reduction of our carbon footprint," said **Heidi Sanborn**, executive director of the California Product Stewardship Council, an organization of local governments working for EPR policy in California. "The reports show that EPR should be included in every climate action plan."

Reports

- EPA Report, *Opportunities to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Through Land and Materials Management*: http://www.epa.gov/oswer/docs/ghg_land_and_materials_management.pdf [1]
- PPI White Paper, *Products, Packaging and US Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, <http://www.productpolicy.org/content/climate-change-epr> [2]

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About Product Policy Institute:

Product Policy Institute is a North American non-partisan, non-profit research, communication, and educational organization. It promotes policies that advance sustainable production, consumption, and good governance. Founded in 2003, PPI works with communities and their local governments to advocate for public policies that protect public health and safety and address climate change by encouraging waste prevention and clean production. PPI has helped local governments establish Product Stewardship Councils in California, New York, Vermont, and Texas, and is currently working in other states.

For more information, visit www.productpolicy.org [6]. P.O. Box 48433, Athens, GA 30604 * Tel: 706-613-0710 * info@productpolicy.org [7]

PPI Press Release



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