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## Fight over EPR in small Massachusetts city

By Jake Thomas

A trade organization representing paperboard packaging manufacturers is claiming a big victory by persuading the city council of a small Massachusetts city to vote down a resolution supporting extended producer responsibility legislation in the state. However, advocates of EPR are questioning the significance of the resolution's failure and say that more dialogue on the issue is needed.

Earlier this month, the city council of Chicopee, a city of about 54,000 people in western Massachusetts, unanimously voted down a resolution that called on state lawmakers to pass legislation that would establish a comprehensive EPR framework in the state.

After the resolution, which is part of a broader effort to generate support from Massachusetts municipalities for EPR legislation, was first introduced, it drew the opposition of the local Chamber of Commerce as well as Pioneer Packaging, a packaging manufacturer located in the city.

During a hearing of the resolution by the Chicopee City Council Public Works Committee, Pioneer Packaging's president, Jeff Shinnars, argued that EPR wasn't needed for paperboard, pointing to the high percentage of state residents that have access to curbside recycling. He also said that the recovery rate for paper is at robust levels.

"Clearly, the voluntary recycling program for paper-based packaging already works incredibly well so should be exempt from the proposed EPR program," said Shinner in a written copy of his testimony. "I say this because the potentially expensive cost of managing and administering a complex EPR program will far outweigh the minor benefits of a point or two increase in paper recycling, an increase that will be achieved soon enough with our existing voluntary recycling program."

The Paperboard Packaging Council, an organization that represents paper and cardboard packaging manufacturers, also got involved. Based in nearby Springfield, the council helped out with opposition to the EPR resolution, according to PPC's Kim Guarnaccia, director of marketing and communications.

Guarnaccia says EPR wouldn't be appropriate for paperboard products, arguing that the industry already uses a high amount of recycled content and its materials are already recycled at high rates. Establishing a take-back program for its products would be cumbersome and unnecessary, she says.

In addition, Guarnaccia says the resolution was poorly worded and lacked specifics, also taking issue with how it lumped paper products together with "hazardous" materials. "We have a vested interest in making sure that paper and paperboard gets recycled," she says, and also hopes that the council's vote will alert paperboard manufacturers of similar resolutions being considered by their municipalities.

After the resolution was voted down, the PPC issued a statement with the headline, "HUGE Win for the Paper Board Industry in Massachusetts!"

But Lynne Pledger, coordinator of the Massachusetts Product Stewardship Council, which advocates for EPR, downplays the significance of the resolution's defeat.

Pledger's organization has been involved in a campaign to encourage municipalities in Massachusetts to pass resolutions urging the legislature to adopt EPR measures. Since 2001, 180 cities and towns in the commonwealth have passed resolutions supporting producer take-back legislation for electronics and other hazardous products.

Chicopee is the only one to reject the resolution, according to Pledger. She attributes its failure to a lack of understanding between its advocates and the paperboard industry, which she argues will ultimately benefit from EPR. Pledger expects Chicopee to eventually get on board and wishes that there had been more time to rework the language of the resolution to get more support for it.

Scott Cassel, the executive director of the Product Stewardship Council, also says that the resolution's failure was due to a lack of its proponents fully explaining the benefits of EPR, which he says is a complex policy instrument and its benefits aren't always immediately clear.

"I see it as a tremendous opportunity to engage in dialogue with the members of the PPC," he says.

Pledger says there are currently bills in the Massachusetts legislature that would establish take-back programs for e-waste, mercury-containing lamps and thermostats. She also says there's a more ambitious bill that would establish a comprehensive EPR framework that would bring in new products over time.

While it's not clear how the bills will fare, Pledger says it's only a matter of time before EPR becomes a reality.

"EPR is coming," says Pledger. "The momentum is building. There is no going back."



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