

British Columbia Product Stewardship Program: Paint (January 20, 2009)

Background

In 1990 the province of British Columbia established the BC Hazardous Waste Management Corporation to facilitate the development of a comprehensive system to manage hazardous wastes in the province. At that time Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection was very limited. A program provided by the provincial government collected HHW at eight locations that were open one to two days every month or every other month. This program cost \$1 million/year and collected an estimated 1 – 8 percent of total HHW generated in the province.

In 1993, a new government appointed a Waste Reduction Commission to study the problem and make recommendations. The Commission's January 1994 report concluded that:

"...efforts must be directed toward breaking the cycle that produces the unwanted hazardous wastes which require hazardous waste disposal facilities. Focusing only on disposal does not break the cycle."

A key recommendation of the report was "Product Stewardship for Household Hazardous Waste." The report recommended that the ministry of environment:

".....develop regulations under the Waste Management Act which require retailers and wholesalers of paints, stains and wall coatings to either: accept for recycling or disposal all containers and contents; or designate a depot located within 4 km of point of purchase for the return of paints, stains and wall coating."

By September of that year, the Post-Consumer Paint Stewardship Program Regulation was in place and a paint take-back infrastructure was under development. The Recycling Regulation, enacted in October 2004, replaced the Post-Consumer Paint Stewardship Program Regulation and provides the statutory basis for the existing paint product stewardship program, as well as a legal framework for establishing new programs. The paint product category is defined under Residual Product Categories in Schedule 2 of the Recycling Regulation.

How the Program Works

Paint producers are required under the regulation to submit a "stewardship plan" for taking back old paint. Initially two producers (Sherwin-Williams and Home Hardware) provided a retail-based return program, while the remaining paint producers formed the not-for-profit stewardship agency BC Paint Care Association (now called Product Care). Product Care provides services for paint, domestic pesticides and flammable liquids to provide a common paint return program through depots.

Today, all paint producers in BC subscribe to the Product Care program. Paint is returned to 103 contracted depot locations in British Columbia. Of this number, approximately 30 are local government facilities such as landfills, transfer stations and recycling depots. About 43 locations are "paint plus" depots, which handle other HHW products in the regulation such as pesticides, flammable liquids and gasoline.

In small remote communities, Product Care provides one-day round-up events. Three of the depots are “contractors’ depots” that handle large volumes of left-over paint with advance notice. Product Care operates a processing center where the returned paint is bulked and shipped for final treatment. For the 2006 reporting period, 25% of the paint was used as “fuel blend” in licensed incinerators, 70% is recycled for various uses including remanufactured into paint and in concrete and cement manufacture and 4% is reused. About 6.7 million “equivalent liter containers” are returned each year (36 million liters are sold each year).

Retailer participation is voluntary. If they choose to participate in paint collection, they are provided with program brochures and signage and they can re-order the public education materials via phone, fax, e-mail or from the Product Care website. Brochures were distributed to over 3,000 retailers in 2005. Product Care also provides a toll-free recycling information hotline at 800-667-4321 and it is open during normal business hours. Product Care also has a website at www.productcare.org where customers can find collection depots, program reports, and other information.

Financing by Industry Stewards

Under its approved stewardship plan, Product Care charges producers eco-fees based on the size of the container. These fees are passed through to the consumer but the retailer decides whether or not that the fee is visible at the point of purchase or not. Either way, they are charged applicable taxes because they are in effect part of the price of the product. Paint that is returned to the depots is transported by contracted transporters to Product Care’s central processing facility in Surrey, BC, where the products are sorted, bulked and shipped to end users for reuse, recycling or other product management options. In the period from 2000 to 2005, the total volume of material handled by Product Care increased 46% (including other HHW as well as paint) while the system costs declined 9%. Product Care maintains a risk management reserve fund which is two times the size of the program’s annual revenues. Product Care’s revenues in 2005 were \$5.52 million.

The Role of the Government Versus the Private Sector

British Columbia’s policy as outlined in the 2002 Industry Product Stewardship Business Plan is that costs for product and packaging stewardship should be shifted from taxpayers to producers and consumers. Much of the infrastructure for stewardship programs is private sector (e.g. retailers, depots) but about 40 local governments have negotiated contractual arrangements with Product Care to collect paint and other household hazardous products covered by the Recycling Regulation at their existing public waste facilities, and local government costs are fully reimbursed.

Additional Information:

- Minister Reynolds’ speech establishing the HWMC
http://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard/34th4th/34p_04s_900613p.htm#10296
- Product Care ~ Information about the British Columbia Stewardship Program
<http://www.productcare.org/BCzoom.html>
- British Columbia Ministry of environment ~ Paint Stewardship Program
<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/ips/paint/index.html>
- Product Care Stewardship Plan, October 2006 ~
http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/ips/paint/psp_pdf/october2006_plan.pdf