

Hazardous materials dumped on government

[By Susan Meeker/Colusa County Sun-Herald](#)

2009-08-17 15:58:21

How many government workers does it take to change a light bulb?

None if the companies that make florescent lights, batteries, aerosol cans, thermometers and other hazardous products take responsibility for collecting and recycling them at the end of their usefulness.

“Most companies that make these kinds of products aren’t paying for the product’s disposal,” said Mark Rappaport, an integrated waste management consultant. “The burden falls to local governments, which spend millions collecting, recycling or disposing of hazardous waste.”

The California Product Stewardship Council is pushing for extended producer responsibility, which means whoever designs, produces or sells a product must take responsibility for minimizing it’s environmental impact throughout all stages of the product’s life.

Rappaport said the stewardship council wants local governments to pass resolutions or ordinances to make producers and retailers responsible for taking back, recycling and disposing of hazardous products in order to remove the financial burden from local governments.

The council also advocates statewide legislation.

Rappaport said placing the responsibility with manufacturers and retailers will also provide incentive to redesigned products in a manner that eliminates or reduces their impact on the environment or increases their recyclability.

Colusa County officials, however, say they have concerns that legislating producer responsibility will be overly burdensome to businesses and consumers – with the cost added to the price of the products.

“My first thought is that businesses don’t need more regulatory restrictions,” said Supervisor Kim Dolbow Vann.

Supervisor Denise Carter was concerned not only with the cost to consumers, but the time it would take to return products to multiple locations.

“I can’t see returning paint to one place, batteries to another and light bulbs to another,” Carter said. “It would simply take a lot of time.”

In line at Saturday’s waste collection event in Williams, Carter was among nearly 170 people to take advantage of free disposal of hazardous waste. Funded by a grant from the state integrated waste management board, the purpose of the event was to collect products banned from landfills.

Colusa County residents turned in 15,936 pounds of oil based paint, 4,072 pounds of latex paint, 1,744 pounds of pesticide, 7,919 pounds of electronic waste, 3,343 pounds of car batteries, 1,274 pounds of alkaline batteries, 380 pounds of aerosol cans, 525 pounds of florescent lighting and 108 pounds of asbestos.

The amount of waste was comparable to an event with twice as many participants, and meant Colusa County residents were doing their part to keep hazardous waste out of landfills and waterways, according to Larry Sweetser, a consultant with the Environmental Services Joint Powers Authority.

“ There was steady traffic throughout the day,” Sweetser said “People hang on to this stuff for a long time. I’ve seen stuff 40-years-old, like 100 percent DDT.”

Sweetser said the event and the two scheduled for next year in Colusa and Glenn County was funded by a \$75,000 grant from the state. The products collected Saturday were shipped

mostly to recycling centers in Nevada and Washington.

Rappaport said if legislation was implemented requiring producers to take back products for disposal, then it would eliminate the need for public collection events.

“As much as we like serving the public, it would be much simpler to take stuff back,” Rappaport said. “Then we wouldn’t have to ask the government for a grant.”

Carter disagreed and said public collection events were a safe way to ensure that hazardous waste doesn’t end up in landfills and waterways and are safely removed from homes where children and pets may be present.

“It’s a hard decision on what to do,” Carter said. “I’m just not sure putting the burden entirely on producers and consumers is the right thing to do. Perhaps we should all share the responsibility.”