



CALIFORNIA WORKSHOP EXPLORES SOLUTIONS TO FLUORESCENT LAMP MANAGEMENT PROBLEM

Contact: Heidi Sanborn, Executive Director 916-402-3911 cell, Heidi@CalPSC.org

Los Angeles, Calif.—Nov 2011 – Fluorescent lamps are an efficient lighting source, but they contain mercury, a potent neurotoxin and need to be properly recycled, according to Steven John, Director of the US EPA Southern California Field Office. To find solutions to this problem, a workshop was held in the Los Angeles EPA field office titled “Extended Producer Responsibility: Exploring Solutions for Mercury Lamps” and co-hosted and facilitated by the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) with a grant from the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) given to the Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority.

California banned mercury containing lamps from landfill disposal in 2006. Yet, according to a [2010 phone survey](#) conducted by the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, only 42 percent of consumers know they are hazardous and 45 percent still throw them in the trash.

And if that isn't enough of a problem, the cost of lamp recovery is outrageous. According to Kevin Hendrick, Executive Director of the Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority (DNSWMA), it is cheaper to buy a compact fluorescent lamp (CFL) or fluorescent tube in his county than to recycle them. Mr. Hendrick stated that he can buy a CFL for \$1 but it costs the DNSWMA \$1.62 to properly manage that lamp. That is why DNSWMA supports Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) as a policy approach so that the producers and consumers of the products pay for end of life instead of the general taxpayer or garbage ratepayers.

Sierra Fletcher with the Product Stewardship Institute presented that Maine has a fluorescent lamp recycling EPR program that is up-and-running. Washington, Vermont and Massachusetts are putting programs in place.

In 2010—the British Columbia Ministry of the Environment required a product stewardship program for mercury containing lamps and was able to meet its goal of 10-12 percent of mercury lamps recycled the first year, according to Lyn Smirl, environmental management analyst from the ministry. Their return-to-retailer program is expected to receive nearly one-third, or 32 percent, of lamps in 2011.

And privately run collection systems save money. According to Snohomish County Washington's Sego Jackson, government-run programs often cost more than privately run ones. For example, in Washington State, the cost of the electronic waste collection system is \$14 million while a manufacturer-run take-back program is closer to \$10 million saving the citizens of Washington \$4 million per year.

Everyone is concerned about cost and jobs as we discuss any change in statewide policy. “There currently are only two recycling companies in California that handle mercury lamps”, said Lighting Resources President Dan Gillespie. If California significantly increases recycling, the hope is that those two facilities will have more throughput and put more Californian’s to work.

However, most “consumers purchase lamps from retailers with no take-back program”, said Heidi Sanborn, CPSC’s Executive Director.

Home Depot is one of the few retailers that recycle CFLs. Since the launch of their residential take-back program in June 2008, more than “4 million CFLs have been recycled” at Home Depot stores, said Jennifer Ewert, Senior Environmental Specialist of Home Depot.

Consumers are beginning to realize that they can either pay for disposal when purchasing lamps or through more expensive government operated systems funded by taxes or garbage rates.

The good news is that the need to use fluorescent lamps to save energy is dwindling quickly. Light Emitting Diodes (LED) technology is becoming available in more lighting styles, last longer than fluorescent lamps, use less energy, and does not have mercury or other toxins, according to Lindsay Hassett, the founder of Illumalighting.

“For too long the burden of end-of-life management of problem products such as fluorescent lights and household batteries have been placed completely on local governments” said Heidi Sanborn, Executive Director of CPSC. Local governments cannot control costs much at the back-end. We need to talk with producers on reducing end-of-life costs by designing for recovery, not disposal. This is why in Californians spend over \$100,000,000 every year managing products that are banned from landfills - which is economically unsustainable.

All the presentations and videos of the workshop on October 27, 2011 are located at http://www.calpsc.org/events/2011-10-27_mercury-lamps.html

For additional information about Product Stewardship go to www.calpsc.org.

CPSC is leading California’s waste management reform by providing education and information about Product Stewardship. For more information on statewide efforts by CPSC, contact Heidi Sanborn, CPSC Executive Director: (916) 402.3911
