

## Focus Groups on Product Stewardship: Who Should Pay?

*The San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments (SGVCOG) received a grant from CalRecycle to establish convenient pilot take-back locations for household batteries and mercury-containing lamps. As part of this effort, a telephone survey and focus group research was conducted with consumers and retailers in the San Gabriel Valley to collect baseline information on their knowledge and attitudes about product stewardship.*

Product stewardship means being responsible for all phases of a product's lifecycle – from design to end-of-life (EOL) - and places the primary responsibility for product EOL management with the producer who makes the design and marketing decisions. When producers are financially responsible for EOL, studies show they do a better job designing products that are less toxic and more recyclable to reduce those costs.

The SGVCOG conducted focus group research into what consumers' and retailers' attitudes are on Product Stewardship policy. Both the consumers and the retailers were asked who they thought is paying to manage collection, recycling and disposal of hazardous waste. The vast majority of consumers assumed that taxpayers are paying for managing these materials as did the retailers.

*"I think it should be half the consumers and half the manufacturers because we are the ones actually using them and disposing of them. However, on the other hand, the manufacturers need to do their part in making the product either safer or more efficient or find some way to replace what's dangerous."*

–Consumer Focus Group Participant

*"We consume whatever the manufacturers produce for us to use so why can't the producers of these CFLs and batteries make a battery or light bulb that doesn't produce these chemicals? They're producing it so they should bear the cost of it, right?"*

–Retail Focus Group Participant

When asked who should pay for the proper handling of hazardous products at EOL, the majority of consumers said the fairest approach is to add the cost of end-of-life management to the price of the product rather than spread it across all tax and rate payers.

Retailers also came to the conclusion that cost of disposal should be added at the front end to the cost of the product rather than spread over all tax or rate payers. Some of the retailers focused on the ethical responsibility of manufacturers to clean up the hazardous products they produce and take responsibility for producing safer products. Some assumed only a few cents would need to be added to the price of the products and consumers would willingly pay the modest price increase.

Both consumers and retailers said that Producer Responsibility includes making products that are less toxic to the environment and that producers have an obligation to help pay for the proper management of the product at its end of life.

