

Paint Stewardship Means Big Improvement in Paint Recycling Options

By Heidi Sanborn, Executive Director, California Product Stewardship Council

In 2010, California became only the second state in the nation to pass stewardship legislation for managing leftover architectural paint when former Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 1343 (Huffman) into law in 2010. This means big improvements are on the horizon for apartment residents and owners in California.

More than 74 million gallons of paint are sold each year in California, according to the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle). But not all paint sold ends up being used, which creates a backlog of leftover paint that must be properly managed. Landfilling leftover liquid paint is banned in California, so local governments have been collecting paint through household hazardous waste (HHW) facilities since the early 1990's. Although the facilities are only seeing a small percentage of leftover paint – approximately 5% of what is leftover, they collect two million gallons each year **costing approximately \$27 million annually** to manage. With low recovery rates and high cost, California needed a better option which is why the state looked to product stewardship as a sustainable solution.

Starting July 1, 2012, the paint industry will begin operating a statewide stewardship program for paint through a non-profit called PaintCare. PaintCare is responsible for Oregon's paint stewardship program which started July 2010 providing the foundation for California's program.

The statewide program will target “architectural paint,” which the law defines as interior and exterior architectural coatings sold in containers of five gallons or less for commercial or homeowner use, but does not include aerosol spray paint or architectural coatings purchased for industrial or original equipment manufacturer use. Contractors and do-it-yourselfers alike will benefit from the new program.

“Our goal is to create a network of take-back sites throughout the state to make it easier for do-it-yourselfers and contractors to recycle leftover paint,” explains PaintCare Executive Director, Alison Keane. “We're currently working with stakeholders to understand the current infrastructure and develop the parameters for establishing collection sites.” The program will include many existing HHW programs and is expected to increase the total number of collection sites throughout the state significantly, giving consumers convenient, local options for paint recycling. “Ideally, we'd like you to be able to recycle leftover paint at the same place you purchase new paint,” adds Keane.

Consumers can expect a slight increase in the cost of new paint purchases in order to fund the take-back program. California's fee structure hasn't been determined yet, but is expected to be similar to Oregon's fee structure. Oregon's per-container assessment fee is:

- \$0.35 for pints and quarts

- \$0.75 for one gallon containers
- \$1.60 for two to five gallon containers.

Abby Boudouris, Household Hazardous Waste Coordinator with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, explains the program benefits. “Local governments are saving money, we’re seeing collection sites in places where there previously was no service, and the services that were already in place are now more convenient for consumers.”

Product Care’s President, Mark Kurschner, explained that some painting contractors were wary of the new system at first. “It’s not unusual for people to be concerned about how a new system will actually play out. But the response has been very positive and we’ve been able to help many painting contractors properly recycle large quantities of paint.” Product Care is the non-profit organization that manages Oregon’s paint stewardship program on behalf of PaintCare.

Paint retailers are expected to benefit from the stewardship system, too. Steve Dearborn, President and CEO of Miller Paint has experience with Oregon’s program both as a retailer and as a private label paint manufacturer. “As a retailer, we’re often on the front line introducing customers to the program for the first time. We’re offering the community a solution for all the paint that’s been stored in garages. We’re also selling recycled paint in the store, which shows that we’re closing the loop. And as a manufacturer, we feel like we’re properly managing our product.” Dearborn added that his stores are seeing new visitors who come to recycle paint and that represents an opportunity to convert those visitors to future customers.

And apartment managers and owners, who paint apartments frequently, will benefit from the program. Although the cost of recycling the paint is now in the product price so you will pay more up front, it comes with the benefit of free recycling at local retailers of paint making proper management much more convenient. It also insures taxes and garbage rates won’t climb due to paint management costs. To find the local San Francisco paint take-back locations go to <http://www.sfenvironment.org/ecofinder> and type in latex paint and the list of stores will pop up.

“This is an exciting time for product stewardship,” said Kimbra Andrews, San Joaquin County HHW Program Coordinator. “California local governments are finally going to see some financial relief. Paint alone accounts for about fifty-percent of most household hazardous waste programs’ disposal costs so this program will have tremendous statewide impact.” San Joaquin County received a \$400,000 grant from CalRecycle to set up a pilot paint stewardship program and established the Be Paint Wi\$e Partnership in collaboration with Tehama County and the City and County of San Francisco. The California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) advocates for product stewardship policy and is the lead partner with the Be PaintWi\$e pilot paint stewardship project. But the benefits go beyond cost savings for taxpayers and garbage ratepayers. Andrews points out, “We also expect to see an increase in green jobs as California’s paint recyclers gear up to handle more paint, so the statewide program is really a win-win.”