



Establishing a Retail Take-Back Program for Latex Paint

Guidelines from the Be Paint Wi\$e Partnership Pilot Project

Background: San Joaquin County received a \$400,000 grant from the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) to establish a pilot latex paint “take-back” program at retail stores selling paint within San Joaquin County and its two partner counties: San Francisco and Tehama. Seventeen retail sites were recruited within the three counties to participate in the pilot project and they collected paint from March, 2010 through April, 2011.

Funded by a grant from the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) and supported by the following partners:



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Step 1 – Recruitment: The project team began by identifying all stores that sold architectural paint within the three counties. In total, the team identified ninety-nine stores, which included retail paint stores such as Kelly Moore and Sherwin Williams franchises, hardware stores such as Ace and True Value, “mom and pop” establishments, and “big box” stores such as Home Depot and Walmart.

A recruitment letter was developed and sent to each store by the County contact. The letter is a direct appeal from the respective county requesting that the retailer partner with the county in the Be Paint Wi\$e Partnership. Stores were asked to either distribute the consumer source reduction education materials or become a latex paint collection site, or both. Local program staff and CPSC contractors followed up on each positive response and met with store staff to explain the take-back program and distribute the educational point-of-sale materials.

During the initial follow up, take-back sites were given the option of collection containers for on-site paint storage. Choices included 55-gallon steel drums, nestable “totes” for sites with limited storage space, or cubic yard containers. Containers were delivered prior to the training session at each site.

Step 2 – Retail Agreements: Program staff developed a [model retail paint collection agreement](#) to serve as a formal written agreement between the local jurisdiction and the retail collection site. The model agreement was based on a sample agreement provided by the City/County of San Francisco which is used in their existing retail take-back programs. Ultimately, both the County of San Joaquin and County of Tehama opted not to sign the retail agreements based on the advice of their legal counsel who felt binding agreements were not necessary. However, the model agreement is a useful tool outlining program expectations, and may be used by other jurisdictions that may need to provide a written agreement. San Francisco continues to use their pre-existing agreements.

Step 3 – Training: The project team developed a [training binder for retail latex paint collection sites](#) which was used for the initial training at each site. Program staff arranged a training session with management and employees and reviewed the

binder contents, including the model agreement. Each site kept the training binder for use as a reference and when training new employees. Because the program is simple and straightforward, a single training session was appropriate and the stores were ready to begin accepting paint immediately thereafter.

Step 4 – Paint Collection: Stores began collecting paint in March, 2010, from residential generators in their respective counties. Employees were instructed to inspect each paint can prior to acceptance to ensure it meets the program guidelines, which include:

- Latex (water-base) paint only
- Original legible label on container
- Container must be rust-free and in good condition with no leaks

Employees were instructed to take the cans from the customer and place them in the containers provided by the program. Cans were not opened and no bulking or consolidation occurred. Employees were instructed to contact either Visions Paint Recycling (for San Joaquin and Tehama County sites) or the County of San Francisco's household hazardous waste program when the container(s) reached three quarters capacity. A convenient sign with the name and phone number of the collector was placed on each container. As the program matured, many sites were placed on 'milk runs' by the collector, which eliminated the need to call for collection.

Step 5 – Follow Up: In July, 2010, the program team began the first round of store site visits and collected the first semi-annual reports from each site. Program staff discussed the program with store personnel to determine how well it was working and to address any problems or concerns. The response from the sites was overwhelmingly positive, with most stating their only concern was that they would like more advertising. Although the semi-annual report and rejection log were discussed during the training sessions only three months prior, only two of the sites were maintaining the rejection log and only one site had filled out the semi-annual report. As a result, program staff helped store personnel fill out the semi-annual reports during the site visits and encouraged them to use the rejection log in the future. There were few incidents of materials being rejected as reported verbally during the site visits. Reasons for rejection included: oil-based paint, unlabeled containers, unacceptable product such as stain, and a few occasions where paint was brought in by a commercial source. Some retailers reported referring the customer to the county's household hazardous waste program. Brochures for the respective county HHW programs as well as business cards for the appropriate county contact were re-supplied during the site visits. During one site visit, it was discovered that the retailer had inadvertently accepted empty paint cans. This was discussed with store staff and their procedures were modified to ensure that store personnel were physically handling each paint can, rather than relying on the customer to place the paint can in the storage containers.

Further site visits were conducted in December, 2010 and March and April 2011. Each time, a [retailer follow-up survey](#) was taken, and semi-annual reports were collected. During the final site visits, retailers were instructed as to make arrangements for continuing the program in their jurisdiction until the statewide program begins in July, 2012.

Step 6 – Paint Collection Data: Visions Paint Recycling provided a receipt for materials collected from every site immediately following each pickup. This information was entered into a spreadsheet maintained throughout the pilot project in order to determine how much paint was collected at each site and the sizes of paint cans collected (quarts, gallons, 5-gallon buckets). It should be noted that both the number of containers *and* the actual amount of paint in each container is reported (i.e., a half full one-gallon paint can would be reported as ½ gallon of paint). San Francisco staff provided semi-annual

reports on the paint collected from sites in San Francisco, although they do not record the container size – but rather only record the actual gallons of paint collected. The cumulative information will be provided to PaintCare to help with planning for the statewide paint stewardship program.

Step 7: Advertising - Advertising is a critical element of program success, but was initially overlooked in the project budget. In September, 2010, the project team was given approval to shift \$28,000 from the paint collection budget to the advertising budget in order to promote the program. Collection increased dramatically following the initial advertising campaign. Sites that previously needed collection only once every two or three weeks needed to be serviced as much as twice within one week to keep up with customer utilization of the program. In December 2010, the project team received authorization to shift another \$57,000 to the advertising budget for a final advertising campaign in all three counties, which again resulted in a dramatic increase in the amount of paint collected.

Summary: The retail paint collection program has been a success. Through March, 2011, the retail collection sites have collected nearly 10,000 gallons of paint in the 12-month pilot program and have saved the counties nearly \$80,000. The participating retailers have reported that they are pleased with the results of the program, with some noting an increase in customer traffic or new sales because of the program. Most have reported a positive feeling of providing an important service to their customers and a benefit to the environment. Without exception, all of the sites have agreed to continue participating until the statewide program takes effect in July, 2012 and the respective counties will fund paint collection costs until that time. A barrier study was conducted by a professional market research firm to identify both the barriers and motivators to retail paint collection program participation – and [both a fact sheet](#) and the [full study](#) are available on the [grant project webpage](#).

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