



Northwest Product Stewardship Council

2010 Mercury Subcommittee Issue Paper

Subcommittee Members: Margaret Shield, Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County, WA; Lauren Cole, Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County, WA; Lisa Sepanski, King County Solid Waste Division, WA; Sego Jackson, Snohomish County Solid Waste Division, WA; Suellen Mele, Zero Waste Washington; Taylor Watson, Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County, WA; Dick Lilly, City of Seattle, WA; Carrie Dolwick, Sierra Club; Veronica Fincher, City of Seattle Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County, WA.

The Issue

More and more residents are choosing to use compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) and tubes to save energy and money. Sales of CFLs have increased 230% during the last two years. Starting in 2012, lighting choices will be further limited as traditional incandescent bulbs that do not meet the new federal energy efficiency standards will be phased off the market.

CFLs and fluorescent tubes contain mercury and must be properly recycled at the end of life. Mercury harms the brain, liver and kidneys and causes developmental disorders in children. It persists in the environment and bioaccumulates in the food web. If thrown in the trash, lighting products can break and expose residents and solid waste workers to mercury.

Recycling rates for mercury-containing lights from all sources, in Washington State, including businesses are only about 20%. This means that the remainder of the mercury is potentially ending up in the garbage and is being released into our air, water and soil.

Some counties in Washington currently have no recycling options for mercury-lighting products. In those communities that do have recycling sites, many locations are a part of voluntary retailer programs that operate without long-term sustainable funding. Many local governments also continue to accept mercury-lighting products at their household hazardous waste collection sites and transfer stations and pay for their recycling with rate payer funds.

During the past two years, the NWPSC has been involved in the drafting of legislation for Washington designed to create a system where product manufacturers are responsible for the financing of a convenient, statewide recycling program for mercury-containing lighting products.

In 2010 the Washington State Legislature passed ESSB 5543 - Recycling Mercury-Containing Lights which creates a convenient, statewide recycling program for mercury-containing lights from residents in Washington State starting in 2013. No-cost recycling services must be provided for residents in each county and, at a minimum, in every city with population greater than 10,000.

The NWPSC Position

Before the ESSB 5543 can be implemented, the Washington Department of Ecology must draft the rules for administering the Recycling Mercury-Containing Lights law. The rule-making process will begin in late 2010 or 2011. The NWPSC will participate in the rule-making process.

The NWPSC Mercury Subcommittee will also conduct outreach to various Washington stakeholders, such as local governments, recyclers, Take it Back Network members and potential collectors to inform them about the legislation and rule-making process and to encourage them to provide input.

Proposed Solution/Recommendations

The NWPSC Mercury Subcommittee will provide input to the rule-making process and conduct outreach to nongovernmental organizations, local governments, and Take it Back Network members to inform them about the rule-making process and the legislation.

Subcommittee Next Steps/Timeline

Throughout 2010:

- Participate in Ecology's rule-making process.
- Develop materials and conduct outreach for stakeholder groups to inform them about the rule-making process and legislation.
- Monitor implementation of the law, conduct analysis of program effectiveness, and provide comments to Ecology and the Legislature as appropriate.
- Continue to recruit Take It Back Network members.