



NORTHWEST PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES, RELATED TO COLLECTION OF USED ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS

The Western Electronic Product Stewardship Initiative (WEPSI) and the National Electronic Product Stewardship Initiative (NEPSI) are engaged in multi-stakeholder dialogues, to be completed in late summer of 2002, to design a shared responsibility framework for managing electronic products at end of life. The principle articulated by the participants is that costs and infrastructure responsibilities should be shared by actors in the product chain. This is a complex and sometimes contentious decision-making process, but one to which the participants are committed.

Meanwhile, citizens are pressuring their local governments for options to recycle their old electronics. (It is estimated that 75% of out-of-service computers are sitting in storage. Once begun, a collection program could draw out a lot of old product, some of which can be quite expensive to handle properly.) Though a long-term solution is the highest priority, this page addresses considerations for interim action.

1. Participate in the WEPSI and/or NEPSI multi-stakeholder electronic product stewardship dialogues. See the WEPSI and NEPSI web sites – www.recyclingadvocates.org/wepsi and www.nepsi.org – and make contact with the appropriate representatives to become involved. The WEPSI/NEPSI processes need your engagement and support.
2. Help establish a private system rather than a government program, or partner with manufacturers, retailers, recyclers, non-profits, and other organizations to share the costs between all entities, and to communicate your interest and commitment that they be involved and responsible. Especially let manufacturers know that you would like them to partner, and help cover the costs of collection, transport and recycling. Don't get discouraged if manufacturers are reluctant to partner with you. More and more manufacturers are acknowledging that they share responsibility to properly manage waste electronics.
3. Don't just contract with a vendor(s) that will get rid of your product on the cheap. Some products are regulated and some recycling operations can be more environmentally responsible than others. (WEPSI is researching the issue of environmentally responsible recycling.) Conduct an environmental review of your vendor(s) and exercise your right to prescribe that your citizens' product be handled responsibly.
4. Organize a pilot program that we all will learn from:
 - a. Use the NEPSI/EPA data collection forms and provide data on your effort. These are available from Gordon Hui of EPA, Hui.Gordon@epamail.epa.gov.
 - b. Do something unique to test a new model, for example:
 - Perform on-site triage with emphasis on product reuse.
 - Separate product by product-type and brand and allocate cost/recovery data accordingly.
5. Don't be afraid to charge a fee. (Other pilots have shown the public is willing to pay.) The public needs to know this is an expensive proposition. However, as a long-term solution a back-end fee could discourage recycling, so make it clear that eventually the costs for proper management should be incorporated into the product's purchase price.
6. Carefully consider who needs assistance with services (such as residents, schools and small businesses.) Commercial generators are likely to have reasonable options available to them and can also work with their equipment suppliers to require vendor take-back. Commercial and institutional generators should be expected to follow local, state and federal laws, but may be unaware of them.
7. Don't make irreversible commitments to "government will pay for it all" collection programs. Having local governments pay for collection, transportation and recycling is not a viable long-term solution for many communities, even if it may be an interim solution for some:
 - a. Representatives of many local governments feel that starting down that path sets a bad precedent.
 - b. Be cautious in the message given to your public because once expectations are built, they will be hard to reverse. There is a flood of product in storage that will eventually enter the waste stream.
 - c. Consumers of electronics, not taxpayers and ratepayers, should cover these costs.

WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO TO ENCOURAGE PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP?

While regional and national efforts are underway to establish an end-of-life collection system that also encourages manufacturers to design for the environment, there is more that can be done by local governments to encourage product stewardship.

Product Stewardship asks all parties who make, sell, buy and handle electronic equipment to take responsibility for minimizing the environmental impacts of those products at all stages of the product's life cycle. It's a change from the current practice of expecting local governments to manage unwanted products, whereby costs fall on solid waste ratepayers and taxpayers, instead of on the producers and consumers who make, choose and use the products.

Product Stewardship calls on producers to:

- Design products that are more easily disassembled and recycled;
- Use less toxic and more recycled/recyclable materials;
- Design products that last longer, with parts that can be replaced or upgraded;
- Take back used products for rebuilding or recycling;
- Develop an environmentally-sound collection and recycling infrastructure;
- Incorporate the costs for these practices into the product price, to be paid by electronics consumers directly (rather than ratepayers.)

There are a number of ways that a local jurisdiction can assist in establishing product stewardship for electronics.

1 Educate yourself, your staff and your policy-makers, and begin to think through product stewardship approaches. There are a lot of opportunities to learn about product stewardship, which is a new approach in this country but well established in others. To start, read the Product Stewardship Principles developed by many state and local governments who are members of the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI). PSI exists to assist state and local agencies in establishing cooperative agreements with industry and environmental groups to reduce the health and environmental impacts from consumer product manufacture, use, storage and disposal. Your jurisdiction may want to join PSI also. Contact www.productstewardshipinstitute.com. A number of cities and counties have introduced Product Stewardship Resolutions about electronics. They can be viewed at www.productstewardship.net.

2 Do the right thing from the start. Work with your purchasing department to purchase electronic equipment that is "Environmentally Preferable." That means using your buying power to require products that are less-toxic, energy efficient, more durable, upgradable, repairable, and recyclable. See the Northwest Product Stewardship Council Guide to Environmentally Preferable Purchasing at www.productstewardship.net.

3 Manage your jurisdiction's electronic waste appropriately from the beginning. That means developing future vendor contracts whereby the vendor is responsible for taking back used equipment after it is no longer wanted. Currently, many jurisdictions continue to auction off nonworking monitors with desirable equipment as a way to dispose of them. We recommend that this practice be discontinued and monitors go through proper recycling channels, until vendor take-back agreements can be negotiated.