



Summary of Listening to Local Governments: A Discussion of Product Stewardship and the Electronic Waste Crisis

Background: This Westside Recycling Coordinator's meeting*, held at the Evergreen State College on September 5, brought together **69** government representatives from Washington State to discuss the following four goals:

- To understand product stewardship
- Share lessons learned regarding local programs
- Explain NEPSI and State/Federal initiatives
- Document local government perspectives on NEPSI and related issues

Recent legislation moved forward by California** and the increasing awareness of the electronic waste problem in Washington State demonstrates this meeting was a timely event for the participants. State and local legislation for electronic waste disposal is also on the immediate horizon for governments and was a clear impetus for people to attend.

A recent poll conducted by Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation found overwhelming support for producer responsibility. The telephone survey, prepared by PRR, Inc. and the Northwest Research Group, Inc., "...found that Seattle area residents overwhelmingly believe that electronics manufacturers should be responsible for designing easily recyclable, less toxic products, and for providing a safe and convenient way to recycle those products." The study also found that "...when faced with a 'pre-paid' recycling fee added to the cost of the product, residents are highly unlikely to adjust their buying habits." In addition, the study found that "...[consumers] would prefer to have the recycling fee included in the overall price of the product, rather than presented as a separate fee." The full report can be viewed by visiting:

http://www.prrbiz.com/WCRC_Report2.pdf

*Semi-regular meetings planned by the Washington State Department of Ecology to share information between local government representatives in the field of waste reduction, recycling, and other sustainability efforts. This meeting was planned largely with the help of the Northwest Product Stewardship Council, a government-led steering committee working on electronics and other product stewardship initiatives.

**A \$10 advance disposal fee per computer and TV monitor was recently approved by the California Legislature and sent to Gov. Gray Davis (D). The bill, SB 1523, is designed to support a statewide recycling program for cathode ray tubes (CRTs), which contain lead, mercury, and other pollutants.

Key Outcomes:

The agenda brought together a wide variety of speakers from the Northwest Product Stewardship Council (NWPSC) and from local governments. Presentations can be viewed by visiting the NWPSC website at:

<http://www.productstewardship.net/productsElectronicsStateLocalPrograms.html>.

The dialogue generated from question and answer sessions was an important outcome of the meeting. *(This can be reviewed in an attached document.)* The following summaries highlight the key statements made by the speakers throughout the day.

Governments can use tools to achieve product stewardship solutions to electronic waste.

- Exporting Harm video is effective for diverse audiences. More information about the video is available at <http://www.ban.org/>.
- CRT Regulation and/or Household Hazardous Waste disposal bans can force manufacturers and governments to look farther upstream for solutions to this waste stream.
- Product Stewardship education is both a philosophy and a strategy for action.

Landfill bans can place local government and others into a difficult and expensive role, while manufacturers and consumers continue to lack fiscal or physical responsibility.

- Illegal dumping will be the result of few limited options for disposal and/or recycling.
- Charities and Thrifts are the recipients of broken CRTs and other electronic waste.

Most public facilities, such as transfer stations or recycling depots, do not have adequate staff or space for collection events.

- Solid waste facilities aren't designed to handle delicate electronics for reuse value.
- Long lines at transfer stations.
- Collection of fees is problematic.
- Unfamiliarity with the facility is a barrier for consumers to bring their electronic equipment to this site.

Government needs to heavily consider the obligations of getting into collection services.

- Little data is available on what programs are most effective. State and local governments are starting to compile this data through initiatives such as the Seattle Assessment and an Eastern Washington assessment.
- Collections can create false expectations in constituency.
- Collections create false image that government can afford to pay for these services.
- The NWPSC document, "Considerations for local government" describes these issues in further depth.
<http://www.productstewardship.net/PDFs/productsElectronicsCollectionConsid.pdf>

While Washington State governments are pursuing product stewardship initiatives, significant structural gaps for electronics reuse and recycling remain.

- Few local recycling facilities exist for these materials.
- Retailers are not participating in *continuous, ongoing* collection of e-waste.
- Material is toxic and difficult to dismantle, reuse, and recycle. High labor costs to dismantle and compliance with environmental regulations result in the material being sent to other countries.

No sustainable funding source exists from local or state governments for electronics collection.

- A sustainable funding source requires management and implementation outside of the public sector.
- There is NEPSI dialogue about the development of consumer fees to be paid upon purchase of an item, but substantial barriers exist for this to occur.
- No state or local legislation has created such a front-end fee.
- Back-end collection fees will not create a sustainable funding source. For example, City of Tacoma charged a \$5 dollar disposal fee at their collection event and only recovered 10% of their costs.

Labor costs and other multinational economic climates will influence efforts to safely recycle and reuse electronics.

- Export of certain metals and parts may be inevitable if not explicitly prohibited.
- Inmates may be 'employed' to provide low-cost labor for dismantling these products.

NEPSI negotiations are under heavy strain and may not produce an agreement between stakeholders. <http://eerc.ra.utk.edu/clean/nepsi/>

- Meeting in Seattle has been delayed.
- Negotiations within NEPSI have not moved forward since the spring.
- Electronics industry is using negotiations to stall local legislation.
- No guarantee that any sustainable solution will be reached.

Based on the Electronics Product Stewardship meeting, the immediate next steps include:

- Need to find a way to continue dialogue and action about this topic. Possible ideas include: website, newsletter, list serve, face to face meeting, conference call, increased participation from local government in the NWPSC...etc.
- Plan similar meeting for Eastern Washington.
- Ecology 'library' for videos? Get tools into the hands of people who are working on this issue.
- Ab Stevels of Phillips Services, is offering an eco-design workshop about electronics design, October 9th and 10th. <http://www.zerowaste.org/events.htm>
* Online Registration: <<http://www.pdc.pdx.edu/>>