



Product Policy Institute

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Local Government Groups Call for Manufacturers to Recycle Toxic Mercury Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs

Three local government product stewardship organizations from the U.S. and Canada today praised retailers and consumers for promoting the switch to energy efficient light bulbs, but said manufacturers must take the next step of creating and financing convenient, environmentally safe recycling systems for toxic mercury-containing compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs).

The California Product Stewardship Council, the Northwest Product Stewardship Council and the British Columbia Product Stewardship Council issued a joint statement today, coordinated by the Product Policy Institute. The statement calls for manufacturers to take financial responsibility for and provide collection programs for fluorescent lights, since the toxins they contain are banned from disposal in many states.

The product stewardship councils are coalitions of primarily local governments working together to promote product stewardship, the concept that whoever designs, produces, sells, or uses a product takes responsibility for minimizing the product's environmental impact throughout all stages of the products' life cycle. The Product Policy Institute is a North American non-profit organization that researches and promotes policies that reduce public costs and promote environmental sustainability.

These groups are working together to require that manufacturers take responsibility for minimizing the environmental impact of CFLs from design to disposal. Local governments and tax payers currently shoulder the financial burden of the disposal of these products, as well as the potential for future environmental liability. The groups today are calling for manufacturers to finance "cradle-to-cradle" management of the products they create in order to promote environmental sustainability. "Cradle-to-cradle" refers to designing and managing products for continuous reuse or recycling, rather than for disposal as waste in "graves."

The groups also applauded pending California legislation that would increase the development and use of energy efficient lighting, reduce the toxicity of the bulbs, and require manufacturers to provide take-back recycling services. They called the legislation a model for all states, and the next step in environmental protections.

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The bill, AB 1109, requires manufacturers to have a system in place for collecting and recycling end-of-life bulbs that contain hazardous materials, such as lead and mercury. Manufacturers would be required to submit a plan to the State on how they will provide an environmentally responsible disposal and take-back program throughout California by July 1, 2009. The measure is sponsored by California Assembly Member Jared Huffman, chair of the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials.

“The companies that make money by selling toxic products need to be part of the solution. Local governments do not have the resources or capacity to manage toxic products, nor should they,” said Carol Misseldine, Director of the California Product Stewardship Council. “Assembly Member Huffman’s approach will result in safer, more efficient lighting while providing a convenient manufacturer-provided collection system, and should be a national model.”

Representatives of the Product Policy Institute and the three councils called for all forthcoming state and national legislation that requires an increase in the use of energy efficient lighting to also include the same take-back provisions outlined in AB 1109.

“This approach allows us to aggressively move forward with more energy efficient lighting technology, reduce toxicity of that lighting, and have a collection system for spent bulbs without burdening already strapped local governments and taxpayers with costs of collection,” said Sejo Jackson of the Northwest Product Stewardship Council.

“In British Columbia, we have take-back programs for beverage containers, medicines, used oil, paint, pesticides, solvents, and soon, electronics, which are financed by industry and manufacturers. Lighting manufacturers are equally as capable of establishing a similarly successful take-back program,” said Raymond Gaudart, Co-chair of the British Columbia Product Stewardship Council.

For more information on the organizations and their programs, visit:

- Product Policy Institute (www.productpolicy.org)
- Northwest Product Stewardship Council (www.productstewardship.net)
- California Product Stewardship Council (www.caproductstewardship.org)
- British Columbia Product Stewardship Council (www.bcproductstewardship.org).

For additional details regarding mercury-containing compact fluorescent lights, visit http://caproductstewardship.org/products/fluoro_p.htm or <http://www.govlink.org/hazwaste/mercury/LampsWithHg.html>

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