



# Summary

## Waste Electronics Stewardship Forum

March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2002, Burnaby, British Columbia

As reported in RCBC's newsletter *Reiterate* last fall, there is growing interest in BC, in Canada and beyond, for the adoption of extended producer responsibility (EPR) approaches to the end-of-life electronic equipment problem. Because of this interest, RCBC convened a one-day meeting in March 2002, co-hosted by the provincial government, to provide information and facilitate dialogue on the application of EPR to the e-waste challenge. The Forum, attended by 69 delegates, was a dynamic and insightful session that has laid the groundwork for ongoing, informed dialogue in BC on this important issue. Here is a summary of what we learned.

### Minister's Policy Address

The Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection, led off the Forum with an overview of the direction that her Ministry is heading, a direction in which product stewardship generally, and end-of-life management of electronic equipment specifically, are priorities. The Minister advised delegates that her Ministry's 2002-2005 Service Plan calls for an "expansion of product reuse and recycling through industry-led product stewardship." The Ministry's "first step" in this regard is the development of a stewardship business plan that will establish a framework for prioritizing possible stewardship initiatives. While the business plan is a work in progress, the Minister noted that she had recently told reporters that end-of-life electronic equipment was one of the Ministry's priorities for stewardship programming. She further indicated that her Ministry generally supported the national approach to product stewardship for e-waste initiated by Environment Canada, saying that she "welcomed a national initiative that ensures consistent, cost effective industry-led approaches across Canada, with the participation of various jurisdictions."

### Defining a Policy Approach

As Duncan Bury, Head of Product Policy at Environment Canada, noted in his presentation, there is growing concern about the volume and the potentially hazardous substances contained in e-waste entering the municipal solid waste stream. A key study in this regard, from a Canadian perspective, is Environment Canada's Oct 2000 status report on the generation of information technology (IT) and telecommunications equipment wastes. A telling fact is that between 1999 and 2005, IT equipment destined for disposal is projected to double, resulting in enough discarded material to fill 3,000 large commercial roll-off containers by 2005. Bury said that considerations such as this have led to an increase in regulatory intervention and a growing emphasis on EPR as a suitable policy approach to the problem.

As a starting point for dialogue on EPR policy approaches to the end-of-life electronic equipment problem, Dr. Thomas Lindqvist, Associate Professor at the International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics at Lund University, provided delegates with an overview of the concept of EPR. He said that EPR is best understood as a "policy principle", the two main aims of which are to "solve problems" related to existing product wastes, and to "stimulate environmentally conscious product development." He offered delegates the following definition:

“EPR is a policy principle to promote total life cycle environmental improvements of product systems by extending the responsibilities of the manufacturer of the product to various parts of the entire life cycle of the product, and especially to the take-back, recycling and final disposal of the product.”

### **Experience and Developments in Other Jurisdictions**

Speaker reports on e-waste initiatives in other jurisdictions showed that there is considerable diversity in terms of the types of EPR models conceivable, as well as complexity with respect to institutional and political factors affecting design and implementation in specific places. Lindhqvist reviewed legislation presently under consideration by the European Union (EU), including directives on **Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment** (WEEE Directive), **Restriction of the Use of Hazardous Substances in EEE** (RoHS Directive) and a proposal for a directive on the **Impact on the Environment of EEE** (Design Directive). These directives, if implemented, would comprise an overarching legal framework within which individual countries in the EU will be required to pursue their own programs. Dr. Lindhqvist also described legislative initiatives in the Netherlands and Sweden.

David Stitzhal, from the Northwest Product Stewardship Council, described two major US initiatives, as well as legislative developments in various states. The **National Electronics Product Stewardship Initiative** (NEPSI), is a multi-stakeholder dialogue, started in 2001, aimed at "the development of a system, which includes a viable financing mechanism, to maximize the collection, reuse, and recycling of used electronics, while considering appropriate incentives to design products that facilitate source reduction, reuse and recycling; reduce toxicity; and increase recycled content." Stitzhal said NEPSI participants had agreed that the national program would be based on a principle of "shared responsibility". It is worth noting here that on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002 NEPSI organizers announced that participants had reached an agreement on a "front-end financing system" that would integrate program costs into the overall purchase price of new electronic products. Stitzhal also discussed the work of the **Western Electronics Product Stewardship Initiative** (WEPSI), and identified legislative proposals in California, Minnesota, Nebraska and South Carolina.

The Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition's Executive Director, Ted Smith, focused on his organization's efforts to raise awareness around the environmental, health and social impacts associated with the generation of e-waste and the newly emerging e-waste export trade. The SVTC co-authored the June 2001 report, *Poison PCs and Toxic TVs*, and the recently released report, *Exporting Harm: the High-Tech Trashing of Asia*. Delegates were shown photographs depicting e-waste recycling operations in Asian countries, which used feedstock from North American sources, including institutions such as the City of Los Angeles. Substandard working conditions and environmental hazards were evident in the photographs. Smith presented delegates with the **Electronics Take it Back! Platform**, an initiative co-sponsored by SVTC that is aimed at raising awareness of and support for a principles-based EPR strategy for management of end-of-life electronic equipment. The Platform includes support for full industry responsibility for financial costs of e-waste recovery, an end to the export of hazardous waste products, and fair labour practices. SVTC is asking governments, businesses and individuals to become signatories to the campaign.

## Canadian Initiatives

Duncan Bury updated delegates on e-waste policy and program developments in Canada. He described the Industry-Canada led Computers for Schools program, as well as voluntary take-it-back initiatives led by the City of Ottawa and the Government of Alberta. On the legislative side, among the provinces, Manitoba has taken the biggest step with its draft **Household Hazardous Waste Stewardship Regulation**, which applies to consumer electrical and electronic equipment, among other products. At the federal level, Bury described Environment Canada's lead role in facilitating the development of a "national solution" to the e-waste problem. Environment Canada's activities in this regard were discussed in detail in the Fall 2001 edition of *Reiterate*.

Central to the "national solution" is the Information Technology Association of Canada's (ITAC) development of a **national voluntary industry stewardship** program, focused primarily on IT equipment, for implementation across the country. Dave Betts, Vice President of ITAC said that a national action plan would be ready by early April 2002, and he outlined the overall characteristics of the plan: "Our plan focuses on an option which would likely result in one national, common program for IT equipment across Canada managed by a not-for-profit corporation. It will likely include some type of point of sale environmental fee similar to what you now see with tires and oil, use of the existing municipal system for pick up and consolidation, a phased-in system eventually servicing all regions of Canada, and a system which maximizes the use of existing corporate and private sector recycling initiatives." Betts also described the key principles for the plan, as well as the challenges that the industry faces in trying to respond the IT waste problem.

## BC Perspective

Eric Partridge, Director of the Environmental Management Branch of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, provided delegates with an overview of the industry product stewardship plan that the Ministry is developing, and where the end-of-life electronic equipment issue fits in. Partridge defined industry product stewardship as: "**A comprehensive life-cycle management system that ensures responsibility and accountability for end-of-life product management and pollution prevention rests with producers and users, rather than taxpayers.**" He also outlined a number of "fundamental principles" that would guide the development of the plan. He advised delegates that the Ministry's business plan would present an overall strategy for the period 2002 - 2005, and that it would include consideration of IT and telecommunications waste. As of March 5<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry expected to commence public consultation on the draft plan by June 2002.

## Challenges

Throughout the course of the day speakers, panelists and delegates identified many challenges facing governments, producers and the waste recovery sector regarding end-of-life management of e-waste. Of these, two contentious topics raised during the BC-focused panel session included the inadequacy of the e-waste recycling infrastructure in BC, which has implications for export of recovered products, and the appropriateness of using prison labour to subsidize end-of-life electronic equipment recovery operations. These challenges served to further illustrate the importance, and the urgency, of developing solutions that integrate end-of-life management into product systems as an integral responsibility of producers, as discussed by Lindhqvist, rather than depending on the emergence of an end-of-pipe recovery system to drive change.

## What's Next?

As promised by Dave Betts, ITAC released a report titled, “*Industry Roadmap – Overview of a National Action Plan for Management of End of Life IT and Telecom Equipment in Canada*”, in late April 2002. The Action Plan is likely to stimulate considerable discussion in BC, particularly as it allocates physical and financial responsibility for collection and shipping functions to local governments. ITAC, which is to be congratulated for taking this step, has requested feedback on its proposal. In addition to the ITAC Action Plan, the Ministry’s Industry Product Stewardship Business Plan is also anticipated in the near future. In the meantime, RCBC will be assessing how it can continue to facilitate dialogue and keep the momentum building towards the creation of an EPR program for e-waste in BC.

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