



BC EPR OVERVIEW

An Introduction to Extended Producer Responsibility in BC

ISSUE: Who should bear the more than \$250 million cost that local governments incur annually to manage the solid waste produced in our province? Should it be the municipal taxpayer, or those who produce and use the consumer goods that are the primary source of that waste? Is it more cost effective to landfill whatever waste we generate, or can recovering and recycling commodities help restructure our system into a closed-loop, sustainable economy in which waste is the exception and not the rule. And what about tomorrow? Do we identify potentially hazardous wastes now and deal with them in an effective and proactive manner, or do we leave coming generations potential environmental time bombs set to contaminate their future? Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs may be the answer to all those questions.

BACKGROUND: The concept of EPR is based on the principle that suppliers, manufacturers, and consumers share the responsibility to minimize environmental impact in a system that manages the cradle-to-cradle life cycle of the products they make, sell and use. Industry-managed EPR programs are gaining acceptance throughout the world.

B.C. currently leads North America in its approach to EPR through Product Stewardship Program Regulations. In 1970, B.C. became the first jurisdiction in North America to establish a mandatory deposit-refund system for soft drink and beer containers. Government programs became active in 1991 for lead-acid batteries and scrap tires. Then in 1994 B.C.'s first true EPR program was created through the Post-Consumer Paint Stewardship Program Regulation to manage leftover consumer paint. Three years later in 1997, the Post-Consumer Residual Stewardship Program Regulation was established, initially covering solvents, flammable liquids, pesticides, gasoline and medications. In June 2003, B.C. consumers saw a revamped used oil program become the latest product of the EPR or stewardship model. The program also included used oil filters and containers. Then on February 16, 2006 the province passed a modification of the Recycling Regulation to include end-of-life electronics, or e-waste. The e-waste program will be implemented by June 1, 2007.

In 2003 B.C.'s Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, (WLAP; now Ministry of the Environment) moved to streamline its EPR regulatory structure. According to its web site, the ministry favoured a single comprehensive, results-based regulation to cover producer-operated product stewardship programs. Some previous WLAP stewardship regulations were prescriptive, telling brand owners not only what to accomplish, but how to accomplish it, right down to the size of the letters required on program signs. Instead of that approach, WLAP chose the objective-based Post-Consumer Residual Stewardship Program Regulation as the most suitable to model its new omnibus stewardship legislation. As part of that process, the Post-Consumer Paint Stewardship Program Regulation and the Residual Stewardship Program Regulations were repealed in 2003 and 2004 respectively. Both were replaced by WLAP in 2004 with new EPR legislation called simply, Recycling Regulation. All future regulated stewardship products will eventually be added as individual schedules under this law.

CURRENT PRACTICES: More than thirty years after the first product management laws were enacted, EPR in B.C. has developed into a system that diverts many end-of-use products from the municipal waste stream and landfills, and into a collection, recovery and management system designed to deal with the specifics of that product. For the majority of regulated products, the related programs are managed by industry stewardship associations based on a stewardship plan submitted to and approved by the Ministry of the Environment. Funding is either generated through advance disposal fees paid at point of retail, as in the case of paint, or as part of the price of the product, as in the case of gasoline. The stewardship organizations track program activity, measure the results against the established objectives within their approved plan, and then report those results annually to Ministry.

FUTURE DIRECTION: But do these programs go far enough? While industry now has the responsibility to manage some of its products in the post-consumer stage of its life cycle, will this give manufacturers incentive to design those products so they are more easily recycled? EPR has become part of the cost of doing business. When industry accepts that less packaging, more easily recovered components, and less use of toxic or dangerous materials translates into a more cost-effective EPR program, we may see those elements considered more and more in the design phase of future products.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Individuals have purchasing power, can write to responsible parties, can raise the issue during election campaigns and can vote accordingly, and/or join with others to share information and put forward a stronger voice and position on issues. Consumers, retailers, environmentalists, governments, producers and recyclers are all represented within RCBC. Since its inception more than 30 years ago, the Council has worked to solve our complex environmental issues by providing the diverse groups concerned with waste reduction issues with a constructive and respectful forum for discussion.

The best way to ensure you keep up with the latest developments in this area and have your voice heard is to join RCBC. You will receive the latest RCBC publications that explore these issues and more.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Ministry of Environment: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/ips/index.html>

RCBC: http://rcbc.bc.ca/resources/product_stewardship.htm

Product Care: www.productcare.org

BC Used Oil Management Association: www.usedoilrecycling.com

Encorp Pacific: www.encorp.ca

Tire Stewardship BC: <http://www.tirestewardshipbc.ca/>

Medications Return Program: http://www.medicationsreturn.ca/british_columbia_en.php

OR CALL

RCBC Recycling Hotline at 604-732-9253 or 1-800-667-4321

This document was developed with the assistance of RCBC members representing consumers, industry, government and environmental perspectives.

RCBC Mission Statement

RCBC is a multi-sectoral non-profit organization promoting the principles of Zero Waste through information services, the exchange of ideas and research.

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