



# EPR OVERVIEW

## An Introduction to Extended Producer Responsibility

**INTRODUCTION:** Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), a term most often credited to Swedish Professor Thomas Lindhquist, can be traced to 1970s Europe as a conservation and waste-avoidance tool. EPR soon gained levels of acceptance in many industrialized nations and is often referred to in North America as Product Stewardship. Although there is no single universally accepted definition, EPR is generally interpreted as a system in which producers take responsibility for managing their product's life cycle to minimize its environmental impact.

**CURRENT STATUS:** EPR continues to evolve and policies vary throughout the world. Asian countries generally interpret EPR as a responsibility for packaging and product disposal. In Europe, where EPR began, governments have aggressively assigned responsibility for end-of-life product management to producers. Sweden, for example, requires a refundable disposal fee on automobiles.

Increasingly, EPR initiatives focus on incorporating a cradle-to-cradle process to promote environmentally responsible product design. The theory behind this approach is that as responsibility falls on producers, there becomes a natural incentive to design for ease of disassembly and recycling, thus making these processes more efficient and cost-effective.

**IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE EPR PROGRAMS:** Since EPR began a number of principles have reached a level of consensus among advocates of the policy. These include:

- Use of EPR policies and programs structured to provide producers with incentives to incorporate changes into designs that produce a more environmentally sound product.
- Use of objective-based rather than prescriptive regulations to encourage flexibility, initiative and innovation.
- Regulators ensure a level playing field so program participation is fair to all producers.
- Policies that produce an approach that ensures environmental benefits realized at the end of life are not negatively transferred elsewhere in the product life stream.
- Clearly defined producer and stakeholder responsibilities.
- Product specific program regulation and policies to ensure effectiveness.
- Re-evaluation of EPR programs periodically to ensure effectiveness.
- Transparent processes for developing and implementing an EPR program that includes the participation of all stakeholders.

**SOME OF THE BENEFITS EPR PROGRAMS CAN PROVIDE ARE:**

- Reduction in overall pollution.
- Reduction in waste sent to landfills.
- Reduced use of hazardous materials in products.
- Increases in the recycled content of consumer products and more efficient use of natural resources.
- Integration of environmental management throughout the product life cycle.

## **PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN AN EPR PROGRAM**

- **Environmental liability** –the producer is responsible for environmental damage caused by the product
- **Economic responsibility** - costs for collection, recycling, resource recovery, or final disposal of products are borne by product consumers and producers.
- **Physical responsibility** – collection and management of the products are the sole responsibility of the producer.
- **Informative responsibility** - producers are responsible for providing public information and education regarding the EPR program for their products.

**EPR INSTRUMENTS IN USE TODAY:** A number of instruments are currently being employed to shift responsibility for product and packaging waste from government and taxpayers to consumers.

- **Deposit- refund systems:** Deposit-refund systems are designed to encourage higher collection rates by providing an economic incentive to return the product to the program.
- **Environmental Handling Fees/Advanced Disposal Fees:** These fees are designed to generate revenue from users of a product to fund the EPR program designed specifically for that product. Fees can be hidden within the price of a product or shown separately. Showing the fee separately adds a component of informing the public, accountability and transparency to the process.
- **Regulations:** These include set recovery rates, disposal bans, mandatory use of recycled or recovered materials and specific program requirements such as accessibility and communications.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT EPR:** 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 with waste reduction interests with a constructive and respectful forum for discussion with each other.

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](http://rcbc.bc.ca/resources/product_stewardship.htm)

### **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.

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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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