



Northwest Product Stewardship Council

Washington Members Position Statement on Product Stewardship Policies

I. Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to define the position of the Washington State members of the Northwest Product Stewardship Council (NWPSC) regarding policies on product stewardship. Washington members of the NWPSC support the development of product stewardship policies for products that contain toxic materials or are hard-to-handle and that minimize the adverse environmental and health impacts throughout the lifecycle of the product, but especially at the end of life, when the product is no longer wanted by the consumer.

II. Background

The NWPSC is an association of government organizations in Washington and Oregon. The NWPSC analyzes policy approaches, recommends legislative proposals to policy makers and stakeholders and tracks legislation, but is not a lobbying organization.

Product Stewardship is defined as a materials management strategy that means whoever designs, produces, sells, or uses a product shares responsibility for minimizing the product's environmental impact throughout its life cycle. The primary responsibility lies with the product producers, who have the greatest ability to minimize the adverse impacts of the product on the environment and human health.

The NWPSC's mission is to enhance Washington's and Oregon's reuse, recycling and waste management systems by working with the waste and recycling industry, consumers, manufacturers and others to connect producers with the costs associated with the end-of-life management of their products to provide incentives to reduce waste, increase recyclability, and reduce the toxicity of their products.

Product stewardship policies, either legislative or voluntary, shift the responsibility for financing end-of-life product management from municipalities and their ratepayers to product producers and consumers. In this approach, producers provide sustainable and dedicated financing for stewardship programs by including the costs of proper end-of-life management in their business costs and/or their product prices. These costs are passed on to consumers that use and benefit from the product, rather than externalizing the costs to local governments and to their ratepayers.

The NWPSC is committed to ensuring that product stewardship policies are applied in ways that support and complement existing waste and recycling systems in our communities including the system regulated by the Utilities and Transportation Commission that has been built through a public private partnership in our state.

Product stewardship policies help to achieve the NWPSC's vision of a prosperous and sustainable society where waste and toxicity are minimized and products are designed to be reused or recycled. Related policy and market approaches critical to achieving this vision include, but are not limited to: consumer education, strategies to increase recycling, effective chemicals regulation, green chemistry initiatives, incentives to develop markets for recyclable materials and green design incentives. Together these strategies can move us towards a more sustainable materials management economy.

III. Position Statement

A. Goals of Product Stewardship Policies

- Improve the management of toxic materials to keep them out of the garbage, incinerators and solid waste landfills and to reduce human exposure and environmental pollution;

- Increase the recovery of recyclable materials that are then used to make new products;
- Provide a sustainable and equitable financing mechanism;
- Reduce the cost of waste management for local governments, to the benefit of taxpayers and ratepayers;
- Provide more convenient and equitable access to collection services across the state;
- Add jobs in waste management and recycling industries by utilizing and enhancing the existing waste management infrastructure.
- Create market incentives that connect producers to the end-of-life management of their products and encourage the design of products that are less toxic, create less waste and are more recyclable;

B. Application of Product Stewardship Policies

Stewardship policies can provide solutions to the following issues:

- Products that contain toxic materials need safe and transparent end-of-life management to prevent harm to people and the environment;
- Public funding is insufficient to safely collect, recycle or dispose of toxic and hard to handle products at end-of-life;
- The infrastructure and services for the collection, transportation and/or processing of certain products are not readily available or convenient across the state;
- Special collection, handling, recycling and disposal procedures are needed to complement the existing waste and recycling system;
- Consumers are not aware of how to recycle or safely dispose of products that are toxic or hard to handle.

C. Legislated Product Stewardship Policies

Effective stewardship policies should:

- Be developed in coordination with all stakeholders including producers, distributors, retailers, waste management companies, recyclers and processors, non-profit organizations, state agencies, local governments, consumers, and others;
- Establish a level playing field by requiring all producers of similar products to finance and participate in the end-of-life management of their products;
- Provide a sustainable and equitable financing mechanism that covers the fair and reasonable costs of collection, transportation, recycling/disposal, promotion and public education;
- Allow multiple stewardship organizations to participate in a stewardship system;
- Define responsibilities for product producers and other stakeholders;
- Use and enhance the existing local collection, transportation, recycling, and processing services where available and suitable, including the system regulated by the Utilities and Transportation Commission;
- Require collection, transportation, recycling/disposal and processing standards that protect human health and the environment and transparency about final disposition of all materials managed through respective product stewardship systems;
- Establish requirements for convenient statewide collection/take back locations;
- Require effective public education and program promotion;
- Recognize and, where feasible, support local community values such as living wages, job creation and skills training;
- Require regular reporting to ensure that program operations and financing are transparent to government, stakeholders, and citizens;
- Require oversight and enforcement by government;
- Establish performance metrics, goals and a mechanism for evaluation, including input from stakeholders and a process for continual program improvement.