

# CARPET RECYCLING AND WASHINGTON SSB 6341: Q&A



## Northwest Product Stewardship Council

### What are the key numbers and statistics related to carpet disposal and recycling?

#### KEY TERMS:

- **Generated / Discarded** – amounts disposed as garbage + recycled + sent for other disposition
- **Recycled** – amount processed and made into new products
- **Recycling rate** – percent of the total amount discarded that was recycled
- **Diverted** – amount prevented from being disposed as garbage—includes amount recycled

WA (2010)	Generated (Discarded)	Disposed	Collected for Recycling	Recycling Rate
Carpet tons	133,668	131,900	1,768	1.32%
Carpet pad tons	33,937	31,838	2,099	6.19%
<b>Total tons</b>	<b>167,605</b>	<b>163,738</b>	<b>3,867</b>	<b>2.31%</b>

(Source: Washington Department of Ecology)

U.S.	2002	2010
Total Discards tons	2,339,000	3,010,000
Recycled tons	23,100	135,650
Recycling rate	1.0%	4.5%

**Note:** For purposes of comparison, figures were converted from pounds to tons.

(Source: Carpet America Recovery Effort CARE 2010 Annual Report (page 13), [www.carpetrecovery.org/pdf/annual\\_report/10\\_CARE-annual-rpt.pdf](http://www.carpetrecovery.org/pdf/annual_report/10_CARE-annual-rpt.pdf))

#### Parties commonly use different units of measure in reporting.

#### Here are conversion factors to assist in comparing numbers:

- 1 ton = 2000 lbs
- 1 million lbs = 500 tons
- 1 billion lbs = 500,000 tons
- 1 square foot of carpet averages .5 pounds
- 1 square yard of carpet averages 4.5 pounds

### How much carpet is recycled?

In 2010, only 2.3% of carpet and carpet padding was recycled in Washington – about 3,900 tons – and about 163,700 tons were disposed in landfills or incinerators. While the national rate has increased from 1% in 2002 to 4.5% in 2010, the potential for improvement is huge both in Washington and across the U.S.

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## Is carpet recycling technology (equipment) available and able to recycle all types of carpet collected?

All types of carpet, including low-nap commercial and high-nap residential carpets, can be recycled. However, processing equipment for some types of carpet may not yet be available in Washington State. One type of carpet that may not be recycled is carpet that is not easily removed from flooring due to adhesives which may render the carpet unrecyclable. Implementing a statewide carpet recycling program in Washington is likely to provide incentives for businesses to bring additional needed technologies to the state. For example, the State of California, which passed a carpet stewardship law in 2010, has determined that it has the infrastructure needed to process post consumer carpet<sup>1</sup> including commercial carpet, which indicates that carpet processing capacity and the technological ability to recycle carpet is in place in that state. Carpet processing facilities in California have increased from four to 18 in anticipation of and since the program began. Several companies describe recent advances in carpet recycling technologies in the Carpet America Recovery Effort's 2010 Annual Report, pages 27-34 [http://www.carpetrecovery.org/pdf/annual\\_report/10\\_CARE-annual-rpt.pdf](http://www.carpetrecovery.org/pdf/annual_report/10_CARE-annual-rpt.pdf).

<sup>1</sup> Declaration & Initial Study Evaluating Approval of California Carpet Stewardship Plan, January 2012, State of California Department of Resources, Recycling and Recovery

## There aren't convenient drop-off locations for flooring contractors or enough processors in the region, so how will a statewide recycling program work?

This is addressed through a product stewardship system. The manufacturers of carpet are responsible for providing convenient locations for used carpet to be taken; investment in research and development on carpet design for recycling; and investment in carpet recycling technologies, equipment and processors. The responsibility for success is placed on carpet manufacturers, not on local flooring contractors. In addition, a steady and reliable flow of material will assist in attracting processors and investors.

## Is the cost for recycling carpet under SSB 6341 like a "hidden tax?"

No. Currently consumers pay for disposal of their discarded carpet, either directly to a disposal facility or through a contractor's invoice. Just as there is a cost to dispose of carpet in a landfill, there is a cost to recycle carpet. Carpet disposal costs are common to flooring businesses and are passed along to the consumer as are other costs, such as for new flooring products, labor, and transportation. Recycling carpet works the same way, with the cost passed along to the consumer. Some carpet sellers/installers choose to itemize the cost of disposal or recycling on their customer's invoice and others do not.

Under SSB 6341, the carpet stewardship organization will collect funds from carpet producers (manufacturers) that sell carpet in Washington. These funds will pay for the carpet recycling program. The program will not charge a user fee at the time discarded carpet is collected. The carpet producers would be free to build the cost of end-of-life recycling of carpet into the cost of their product, rather than leaving it to the carpet sellers/installers to recover carpet recycling costs from the consumer.

## What are the fees for disposing and recycling of carpet in Washington State and will a stewardship program increase costs to consumers?

In Washington State, disposal fees range from \$27 to \$335 per ton, with the average disposal fee in urban counties being \$103 per ton and in rural counties \$87 per ton, with the average of those being \$95 per ton. Facilities in Washington State that accept carpet for recycling charge between \$60 and \$95 per ton.

Whether carpet is destined for disposal in a landfill or to be recycled, public and private solid waste facilities and recycling facilities charge a fee to receive that material. Consumers are already paying this fee to dispose of carpet when it's removed from their home or business.

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A product stewardship program for carpet will set up convenient drop-off locations that will allow carpet to be recycled rather than disposed, and could result in significant savings for the consumer.

SSB 6341 is expected to result in a more efficient and effective system that will save money for the homeowners and businesses with carpet to recycle. In our experience, the increased volume of carpet being recycled will drive costs down due to a variety of factors, including economies of scale. In turn, the price of reclaimed fiber would become more competitive with the price of virgin, which mirrors the price of oil. Producers can use their business experience and relationships to create the most cost effective system. And the steady stream of guaranteed material will attract additional recyclers to the state, further lowering the costs of the system as there are more businesses competitively offering services to the stewardship program.

## What is happening in other states?

### CALIFORNIA

California is the only state to have a stewardship program in place. California enacted AB2398, signed into law September 2010. The funding system began in July 1, 2011. CalRecycle rulemaking and CARE Product Stewardship Plan have been in process over the past several months.

Plan (a direct link to updated Plan is on this web page): [www.calrecycle.ca.gov/Actions/PublicNoticeDetail.aspx?id=614&aiid=588](http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/Actions/PublicNoticeDetail.aspx?id=614&aiid=588)  
California Documents: <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/EPR/PolicyLaw/Carpet.htm>

### NEW YORK

There is proposed legislation in one other state, New York, in addition to Washington: A08492 establishes a carpet stewardship program [www.assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default\\_fld=%0D%0A&bn=A08492+&term=&Summary=Y&Actions=Y&Memo=Y&Text=Y](http://www.assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default_fld=%0D%0A&bn=A08492+&term=&Summary=Y&Actions=Y&Memo=Y&Text=Y)

### OTHER STATES

Carpet recycling facilities are available in 25 states, District of Columbia, and Ontario, Canada. Most are in the southeastern and Mid-Atlantic States and 26 are west of the Rocky Mountains, including 2 in Washington, 2 in Oregon and 19 in California.

Link to map and recycler contact information:  
[www.carpetrecovery.org/waste.cfm](http://www.carpetrecovery.org/waste.cfm)

***Learn more at [www.productstewardship.net/policiesCarpetNWStates](http://www.productstewardship.net/policiesCarpetNWStates).***

***Visit [www.kingcounty.gov/linkup](http://www.kingcounty.gov/linkup) to read and/or participate in a blog about SSB 6341 and learn about an effort to increase carpet recycling in the Pacific Northwest.***