



California Product Stewardship Council

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600 Million and Counting

One year after the State of California banned fluorescent lamps, household batteries and many other common household electronic products from the trash, a new state organization is calling on manufacturers to take responsibility for the items they make, from production to disposal. These products contain toxic components that potentially can be reformulated with less toxic ingredients—and the cost to dispose of these toxic products, currently paid for by municipal governments and garbage ratepayers, is exceptionally expensive.

The California Product Stewardship Council, a coalition of local governments formed last year to promote producer responsibility for products that end up in the waste stream, estimates that since the ban went into effect on February 8, 2006, more than 600 million batteries, fluorescent lights and electronic goods have been sold in the State of California.

"The cost of collecting and properly disposing or recycling these products easily exceeds \$100 million a year," observed Carol Misseldine, Director of the California Product Stewardship Council. "The companies that make money by selling toxic products need to be part of the solution; local governments do not have the resources or capacity to manage toxic products effectively, nor should they."

The banned products, collectively known as "universal waste," contain toxic elements such as mercury and cadmium, which are known to cause environmental and human health problems. When disposed of improperly in a landfill, the toxic elements can leach into the water table, or turn into a gaseous form and disperse through the air.

"Right now, local governments have a tough choice to make," said David Assmann, Deputy Director of the San Francisco Department of the Environment. "We must either ignore the State law and send toxic products to the landfill, despite the established dangers to public health, or statewide increase fees or divert \$100 million away from vital public services such as police, fire, schools and public transportation."

The California Product Stewardship Council recommends working with product manufacturers as an alternative. By making manufacturers responsible for the end of life disposal of toxic products, manufacturers will have the incentive to minimize toxicity and help set up cost-effective recycling systems.

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Mission To shift California's product waste management system from one focused on government funded and ratepayer financed waste diversion to one that relies on producer responsibility in order to reduce public costs and drive improvements in product design that promote environmental sustainability.