



# Times-Standard

## PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP IS A BETTER WAY

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Pharmaceuticals have been detected in the water supplies of 24 major cities in the United States, affecting 41 million people. This includes antidepressants, anticonvulsants, estrogen, Viagra and more. This may be news to many, but local governments have been aware of this for some time.

While the water purveyors would rather not disclose this to the people using the water, consumers should ask how this happened in the first place. Every day pharmaceuticals are flushed down the drain, and most municipal treatment works do not process or remove these medicines before the "treated" water is discharged into our nation's waterways.

There is growing movement dedicated to requiring that manufacturers take responsibility to take back hazardous products. Manufacturers benefit from the production and sale of these products, and they should be held accountable for the impacts of chemicals and other hazardous products when they are disposed unsafely. This approach is referred to as extended producer responsibility, product stewardship, or product take back.

Sadly, pharmaceutical waste is only one example of the many hazardous products that are sold each year in our country. Historically, local government has been expected to foot the bill for recycling and disposal services for a growing list of materials that require special handling and cannot be disposed in the municipal solid waste stream. This includes electronic waste, universal wastes and hazardous

waste.

Electronic wastes include televisions, computer monitors, computers, cell phones and anything else that has a circuit board. Universal wastes include treated lumber, fluorescent light tubes, batteries, and anything that contains mercury, such as mercury thermometers and thermostats. This fall, a new law will ban injection needles from disposal in the solid waste stream. It is presumed that local government will again step up to plate and provide alternative disposal.

Local governments have tried to provide safe disposal or recycling options for these materials, but we simply can not afford this anymore. Often the disposal cost is subsidized to make legal disposal free or almost free, in order to encourage people to do the right thing. In effect we are all paying for the cost of disposing these hazardous products, while the manufacturers continue to invent new and different toxic products.

There is better way. Last year a new organization was incorporated, called the California Product Stewardship Council. This group is comprised entirely of local government agencies, involved with solid waste, recycling, wastewater treatment or storm water management.

The mission of CPSC is to shift the expensive burden of managing these hazardous products from the budgets of local governments to become the responsibility of the brand manufacturers that made them. If the producers of these products are held responsible for the end-of-life management of these products, that would create an incentive to redesign products to be less toxic and more repairable or recyclable.

Product stewardship has also taken off in other states and countries. Many European countries and

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Canada have working product take-back programs that are predominantly managed by the manufacturers. Washington State also has recently started producer responsibility programs.

In California, the main State agency that regulates solid waste and recycling has adopted a framework for producer responsibility in California. This framework will serve as a model for legislation that will define manufacturer responsibility for products that are sold in California.

The bottom line is that customers always pay the cost of managing this toxic trash. Currently, we pay several times for the same product. We purchase the product, and then we pay again to dispose of it. We also pay for the cost of cleaning up illegal dumping or we pay the cost of living in a more polluted world.

What we are proposing, is that the customer should pay only once. When we buy the product, the cost of disposal will be paid at the point of purchase. Disposing of these products should be as easy as it was to buy them in the first place.

The people understand and support this approach to handling these hazardous wastes. In response to a survey question that was asked to county residents at the 2007 Del Norte County Fair, over 74% of those surveyed said that if a product or package is hazardous or proven to damage the environment, either the manufacturer should be required to take it back for reuse or recycling, or a fee should be placed on new items to pay for clean up or recycling or both. Over 20% of those surveyed said such items should be banned completely.

Manufacturers must understand that product take back programs are a logical extension of good customer service. While many have voluntarily initiated programs to take back products, this must

be made mandatory so that all similar businesses are competing on a level playing field.

Local governments on the Redwood Coast are also getting on board with this effort. The Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority and the Humboldt Waste Management Authority have both joined the California Product Stewardship Council. Larger statewide organizations have also adopted policy positions supporting extended producer responsibilities, including the California League of Cities, the California State Association of Counties, the California Retailers Association and the Regional Council of Rural Counties.

There is a groundswell of support for extended producer responsibility from local government from Del Norte County to San Bernardino County. In the long run this shift in responsibility to the manufacturers will save the budgets of our local government, increase the convenience for consumers to safely dispose of their toxic trash and improve the material efficiency of manufacturers. This is an idea whose time has come.

For more information check the website for the California Product Stewardship Council:

[www.caproductstewardship.org](http://www.caproductstewardship.org)

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