Who Pays for Recycling?

How Local Governments Can Save Money and Increase Recycling with Extended Producer Responsibility Programs

NEBRASKA RECYCLING COUNCIL

Across the U.S., local governments are increasingly being asked to pay more to support local recycling programs. In many rural areas, communities are struggling to maintain these programs. While recycling is popular with residents and delivers proven environmental benefits, there is growing recognition that the economicsare unsustainable unless product manufacturers share some of the responsibility.

While local governments have traditionally borne the costs of solid waste programs, new approaches are gaining momentum around the world that shift some of the costs and responsibilities from local governments and taxpayers to product manufacturers. Under these programs, product manufacturers are responsible for designing, financing, and managing recycling programs for their products. Known

The goal of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs is to require that product manufacturers take ownership of end of life systems for their products—by establishing, funding, and managing these systems— with state or national government setting the performance goals and ensuring accountability and transparency. This provides incentives for manufacturers to prevent waste at the source, promote sustainable product design, and in effect, support community recycling goals and programs.

EPR programs began in Europe more than 20 years ago and have spread to every continent. Across the U.S., there are 116 policies in 33 states directed at 14 different types of products. These include bulky or hard-to-recycle materials such as electronics, paint, mattresses, carpet,

Benefits of EPR Policies

- **Reduces costs to taxpayers**
- **Expands access to convenient recycling locations and services**
- **Encourages manufacturers to design products to be more recyclable and less toxic**
- **Eliminates the cost to consumers at the end of product life**

Over 60% of Nebraskans agree that manufacturers should pay the costs of providing recycling services for the products they create.

as Extended ProducerResponsibility (EPR), this results in greater access to recycling and improved recycling rates, a shift toward environmentally sustainable products and packaging, and reduced costs to local governments.

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY & PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP

Product manufacturers and brand owners control how a product is designed, including the materials used and the manufacturing process. This means they have the most direct influence on whether their products and packaging can be recycled. Yet in most cases, producers have no stake in the success of local recycling programs. Instead, the costs to recycle or dispose of these materials falls on consumers and local governments.

fluorescent lighting and pharmaceuticals. Under most EPR programs, producers charge a small fee upon the sale of their product, then use this fee to develop or expand recycling programs. The consumer pays the fee upfront when they buy the product, instead of when the product is discarded.

The shelf price reflects the full cost of the product, including the cost to manage it at end of life, greatly increasing the liklihood that it will be recycled.

$20-27 MILLION

Amount local governments in Nebraska could save per year in tax dollars by implementing EPR programs for hard-to-recycle products.

How EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY Systems Work

- State or national governments adopt EPR policy.
- Manufacturers form a coalition to manage their product wastes.
- Manufacturers coordinate with retailers to charge a small fee on sale of products.
- Fee is collected & used to establish recycling facilities.
- Manufacturers report back to governments on collections, expenses & other metrics.

Local governments can save money with EPR policies in two ways:

1. Producers take over the recycling programs or pay the municipality to collect, transport or recycle the materials.
2. Communities without existing programs have new convenient services, reducing disposal costs. For example, many EPR programs focus on products collected through household hazardous waste programs, which are very expensive for local governments to operate. Through EPR, the producers may either take over the program or pay the government for their costs to continue to run the programs.

$ POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS BY PRODUCT TYPE

- **Electronics: $2.73 per person**
- **Fluorescent lamps: $0.76 per person**
- **Mattresses: $0.55 per person**
- **Paint: $1.99 per person**
- **Pharmaceuticals: $0.90 per person**

EPR IN ACTION ACROSS THE U.S.

ELECTRONICS
Electronic wastes contain toxic substances such as lead, mercury, and brominated flame retardants, which threaten public health and the environment if not properly managed when no longer in use. EPR policies for electronics are in place in 23 states, saving local governments millions of dollars, creating jobs in recycling, and protecting our environment.

PAINT
Colorado is one of 10 states to adopt an EPR policy for paint. Manufacturers charge a small fee of 75 cents per gallon of paint to fund collection infrastructure, and nearly 95% of the state now has access to paint recycling within 15 miles.

MATTRESSES
More than 50,000 mattresses are thrown away each day in the U.S., and less than 5% are recycled. Three states have now adopted EPR policies for mattresses to help develop the infrastructure and markets for managing these bulky items and reduce illegal dumping.

Nebraska participates in some of the national voluntary take-back programs, such as the Call2Recycle program for rechargeable and cell phone batteries. Plus, nearly 200 Nebraska pharmacies participate in a state-funded, voluntary take-back program for used prescription drugs and medications, providing residents with safe disposal options that protect groundwater supplies from improperly discarded pharmaceuticals.

Learn more!

Learn more about the principles of EPR and track who's taking action across the U.S. through the Product Stewardship Institute at www.productstewardship.us. Then reach out to Nebraska Recycling Council to get involved in statewide efforts to develop EPR policies at www.nrcne.org/resources/recycling or call (402) 436-2384.

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