

MUNICIPAL ROLES FOR DISCARDED ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS

Background

Discarded electronic products, including computers, monitors, cell phones, televisions, fax machines and microwave ovens, are a growing component of the municipal waste stream. They are often complex with hazardous materials, making disassembly and recycling difficult and expensive, while many materials are valuable if recovered.

The European Union has already created a directive for waste electric and electronic products (WEEE) requiring industry responsibility to be legislated by member countries. In the United States, progress has been slow because of industry opposition.

The industry sector in Canada, as represented by Electronic Products Stewardship Canada (EPSC), has proposed a national program where it would take responsibility for material recovery of a suite of residential discarded electronics, from transportation from depots to product processing, but that municipal governments would be responsible for collection.

FCM, with federal financial support, undertook a consultation process to determine the municipal perspective on the role municipal governments should play in the management of electronic waste. The consultation gathered input from municipalities across Canada between January and March 2003 using three methods: an on-line survey to 1,000 municipal governments, regional consultations in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Alberta and BC, and a national workshop. The FCM Solid Waste Advisory Group also identified important aspects to add to the final position and recommendations to the FCM Standing Committee on Environmental Issues.

The final FCM recommended position, as well as the consultation report, including summaries of the survey, will be available soon on the FCM Web site under Sustainable Communities. This national municipal position is intended to contribute to discussions with industry, other orders of government and the public on a common national approach to the management of discarded electronics. It would lead to the first truly national stewardship program in Canada.

While waste is generally not managed in a consistent fashion in Canada, a nationally common framework with consistent principles could have many benefits, for example, on waste management planning, costs for industry, technical developments for improved infrastructure for resource recovery,

and markets (and thus local and national economic returns). This is particularly true for discarded electronics, as Canada constitutes only five per cent of the global market for the industry and distances and small populations can reduce options.

Municipal Position on Management of Discarded Electronics

FCM recommends that a national strategy on the management of discarded electronics should be guided by the following principles:

- Be financially, technically and environmentally sustainable;
- Include all electronics generated by all sectors;
- Follow the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) hierarchy;
- Include partnerships with, and universal access to, all stakeholders;
- Have sound governance with consistency across the country, including municipal input and representation on boards;
- Recognize regional differences at the implementation level;
- Have achievable, meaningful goals with policies and other tools to ensure success;
- Ensure programs are convenient in order to maximize diversion, and that there is clear and effective promotion and communications;
- Have universal consumer fees across the nation;
- Include historical waste; and
- Ensure that program costs are borne by industry, including that of historical waste.

The essence of the national municipal view on their role in the management of discarded electronic products is that:

- Consumers and industry, as beneficiaries of the products, should pay for all costs associated with such a program;
- Local governments may participate in the collection of electronics in the short term, on a cost-recovery basis or through taxpayer funding, to facilitate start-up of the program and deal with historical waste. This financing of incremental costs should be phased out, or documented for recovery from the electronics industry program, within a relatively short timeframe;
- Use of existing municipal collection and communication/public education systems may be appropriate;
- Landfill bans are appropriate once alternative infrastructure is in place.

Next Steps

1. Disseminate FCM position to:
 - municipal, provincial/territorial and federal governments for consideration in establishing their programs and regulations;
 - provincial and territorial municipal associations;
 - industry (EPS Canada); and
 - waste organizations across Canada.
2. Identify and collaborate with industry and other orders of government on pilot projects regarding collection, such as on rural/remote and urban differences or return-to-retail.
3. Support end market development through a municipal campaign to implement procurement of electronic equipment from suppliers that provide end-of-life recovery and that meets best design-for-environment requirements (such as lowest toxics, minimum material use and design for reuse, recyclability and longevity). “You aren’t supporting recycling if you aren’t buying recycled.”
4. Collaborate with industry to:
 - develop processing and reuse markets as soon as possible to ensure there is strong demand and good prices for recovered materials;
 - work towards criteria rating “greenness” of products rewarded through a variable fee scale;
 - help electronics companies to pool their resources with other industry stewards that have already set up collection infrastructure; and
 - expand the program beyond residential to business-related discarded electronics. This is a large share of e-waste for which the management is questionable and will be a public relations issue if not dealt with very early in the implementation of residential electronics.
5. Through provincial and territorial municipal associations, arrange meetings of municipal and provincial politicians, as well as at the staff level, particularly to ensure that any municipal or other public financing of municipal collection is short-term.
6. Promote with federal and provincial/territorial governments, policies and legislation to:
 - facilitate roll-out of a nationally consistent program;
 - ensure accountability and transparency in stewardship programs;
 - support recycling and end-market development by requiring minimum recycled content in relevant products sold or manufactured in Canada; and
 - reduce waste at source, including elimination of toxics in products, minimum material use and design for reuse, recyclability and longevity.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that FCM accept the above national municipal view on management of electronic waste and next steps.

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