

Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation

2005 Program Highlights

WCRC focuses on programs that utilize our roots in recycling while expanding into the cutting-edge world of producer responsibility and product design for recyclability.

Producer Responsibility

One of WCRC's goals is to educate and organize concerned Washington citizens to call for manufacturers to adopt *producer responsibility* as a way of doing business. In this approach, manufacturers are responsible for financing and arranging convenient recycling programs for their products. This creates a financial incentive for manufacturers to design products that are less toxic and easier to recycle.

Although producer responsibility can be applied to a wide range of products, WCRC is currently focusing our efforts on electronics, household pharmaceuticals, and mercury switches in automobiles.

E-Waste

Computers and TVs contain valuable materials that can be recovered through recycling. They also contain lead, mercury, brominated flame retardants and other toxic substances, and therefore pose a threat to human health and the environment when improperly disposed.

- WCRC is playing a **leadership role in developing e-waste legislation** to be proposed in the 2006 legislative session. The result would be a convenient no-charge recycling system for computers and TVs, implemented and financed by manufacturers. We are collaborating with key business, government, and NGO partners to develop bill language that meets the needs of diverse stakeholders. This is the culmination of three years of careful groundwork and coalition building. Launching e-waste recycling is one of the **environmental community's legislative priorities** for 2006.
- WCRC **actively participated on Washington's electronics advisory committee**, convened by the Department of Ecology to consult with electronics manufacturers, local governments, environmental groups, and others. Throughout this process, WCRC effectively advocated for producer responsibility and convenient electronics recycling for our members and all Washington citizens. Ecology has incorporated a producer responsibility approach into their draft report and recommendations to the legislature.
- To provide opportunities right now for citizens to responsibly recycle their computers and TVs, WCRC is working to create **"Take It Back Networks" in Yakima, Island, Pierce and Thurston Counties**. These jurisdictions want to partner with retailers and other small businesses to take back computers and televisions for reuse or responsible recycling. Yakima County's program has just kicked off, with four participating retailers. Programs in the other counties are expected to start up in 2006. These programs can easily transition to a manufacturer-paid system when e-waste legislation passes.

- WCRC provided Washington State Surplus and local governments with information on the human health and economic **problems associated with the use of prison labor to process electronics**, and advocated for the use of responsible, private sector recyclers.
- WCRC educated citizens and various stakeholders about electronics and producer responsibility through presentations and displays, a print ad in the Tacoma News Tribune, and media coverage. To date, we distributed our fun and informative “*Citizen’s Guide to Producer Responsibility*” to about 11,000 residents, elected officials, local government staff, and electronics retailers.
- WCRC is a member of the **Computer TakeBack Campaign**, a national coalition of organizations promoting clean production and producer take-back of consumer electronics. WCRC participates on the Campaign’s Policy Working Group.

Household Pharmaceuticals

Unused pharmaceuticals are entering streams and the Puget Sound in part because people have few safe and convenient disposal options. Scientists have linked pharmaceuticals in surface waters to disturbing ecosystem changes and suspect that organic contaminants in the water from pharmaceuticals have the potential to disrupt the endocrine systems of hundreds of freshwater, estuarine and marine species as well as humans.

- WCRC is collaborating with governmental and private organizations to **design and conduct a pilot program** that will make unwanted pharmaceuticals as easy to return as they are to purchase. The pilot will set up a system for dropping off unwanted household pharmaceuticals at participating pharmacies.
- To determine current practices regarding the disposal of pharmaceuticals and the willingness of residents to utilize pharmacy drop-off programs, WCRC has developed a set of questions to be included in a **survey of King County residents**. The survey will be conducted in January.
- WCRC is **researching how best to dispose of unused pharmaceuticals** from households. The regulatory framework for handling pharmaceuticals adds to the complexity of this issue.

Mercury Auto Switches in Vehicles

Mercury switches in vehicles are used in automatic car trunk or hood lights. According to the EPA, mercury emissions from the melting of scrap cars is currently the single largest source of unregulated mercury emissions in the U.S. Mercury is a persistent neurotoxin that builds up in the food chain and is harmful at very low levels.

- WCRC supported efforts to pass legislation requiring auto manufacturers to establish and fund a system for the **removal and safe management of mercury auto switches** in scrap vehicles. The bill passed the Senate but did not receive a vote in the House. We expect legislation to be proposed again in 2006.

Additional Programs

- WCRC represents citizens on **Washington State's Solid Waste Advisory Committee**, which addresses solid waste, recycling, composting and waste reduction issues that are pertinent statewide.
- WCRC supported the Department of Ecology's budget request to implement the state solid and hazardous waste plan, also called the **Beyond Waste Plan**. Ecology successfully received that state allocation.
- WCRC is actively supporting the restoration of Coordinated Prevention Grant **funding to local governments** for their hazardous waste and recycling programs. This funding was unexpectedly and significantly cut in the 2005 legislative session.
- WCRC **advocated for a strong rule for PBTs** - persistent, bioaccumulative toxins - such as mercury and dioxins. WCRC provided testimony to the Department of Ecology as they developed a rule to address the listing criteria and the framework for developing chemical action plans for priority chemicals on the list.
- WCRC collaborates with various networks to increase our effectiveness. WCRC is a member of the **Toxic-Free Legacy Coalition**, and participates in the **Washington Blue-Green Alliance** and the **Collaborative on Health and the Environment – Washington**. We also are involved with a network of environmental groups in Washington that work together to establish legislative priorities and agendas, and to communicate a concise and consistent message to legislators and the governor's office.
- WCRC is a member of Each Share of Washington and its Membership Participation Committee. An alliance of 65 leading conservation and environmental organizations, **Earth Share of Washington** encourages employees to give to the environment at work through payroll giving programs.