

Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation 2007 Program Highlights

Keeping Medicine Out of Our Water

With WCRC's help and lots of teamwork, a pilot project is underway to collect and dispose of unwanted household medicines. The project has been launched at 16 Group Health Cooperative pharmacies, with additional locations planned. This is the first program of its kind in the country, and it's a big step toward making unwanted medicines as easy to return as they are to purchase. In its first year of operation, the pilot program collected more than 3,000 pounds of medicines in their packaging.



of

Improper disposal - down the toilet or into the garbage - increases the risk environmental contamination from medicines that make their way into Washington's waterways and the Puget Sound. In addition, medicines that accumulate in our medicine cabinets can contribute to accidental poisonings and illegitimate access that can lead to abuse. Now there is a better way.

WCRC took a lead outreach role on this project, creating educational materials, a website, and a compelling display. We developed a database of key stakeholders and implemented pharmacist and customer surveys to gather feedback about the program.

WCRC is also working toward an ongoing sustainable product stewardship system similar to British Columbia's program, which is funded by over a hundred drug companies as a "cost of doing business." We collaborated on the development of model policy and are supporting state legislation requiring producers to pay for the collection and disposal of unwanted medicines from households.

Looking Downstream to Medicine Disposal . . .

WCRC continues to advocate for household medicines to be disposed in the manner that best protects human and environmental health. WCRC has been researching alternatives to high-temperature incineration and is preparing to convene a series of conference calls with scientists, non-profits and others on this issue. The goal is to discuss emerging technologies and determine what steps are needed to create and implement a disposal option for medicines that is more environmentally sound as well as financially viable.

. . . And Upstream to Medicine Design and Practices

While proper disposal of pharmaceuticals is important, WCRC is also looking "upstream" to find ways to reduce the potential eco-toxicity of medicines as well as to reduce the quantities of medicines that become waste in the first place. WCRC is hosting a think tank designed to brainstorm ideas for ways to reduce the impact of medicines on the environment. The first meeting was held in November, with additional meetings scheduled in 2008. As we expand participation, think tank members may include doctors, nurses, pharmacists, toxicologists, chemists, environmentalists, drug developers and policymakers. Our intent is for the think tank to generate specific action steps to guide WCRC's work in this area over the next year.

Climate Change and Recycling

Recycling materials into new products saves energy and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

This year, WCRC worked with others to develop a bold policy option to impact climate change by significantly expanding source reduction, recycling, and composting. The policy option has been submitted to the State's Climate Advisory Team, which is considering a full range of policies in response to Governor Gregoire's "Washington Climate Change Challenge." If implemented, the option would dramatically decrease waste and increase recycling - and reduce greenhouse gases by an estimated 29 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent between now and 2020.

Another Step toward Implementing Washington's Landmark Electronics Recycling Law

Last year, Washington passed a groundbreaking electronics recycling law that will result in manufacturer-funded recycling for TVs and computers from residents, schools and small businesses. However, WCRC soon learned that our work was far from done. In 2007, WCRC actively participated on an advisory panel to develop rules to implement the law and create recycling standards. We advocated for environmentally-protective standards, provided comments on many rounds of draft rules, and encouraged others to participate. Our thanks go to the 20 environmental groups and over 500 individuals who signed onto letters, attended a hearing, or sent emails asking the Department of Ecology to develop strong standards.

Ecology recently released the final rules, which contain some key protections. However, Ecology determined that it was beyond their legal authority to require that subcontractors handling toxic materials meet the same requirements as the recyclers – opening up the possibility that hazardous materials could be exported to developing countries. This stipulation will instead be included in voluntary “preferred” standards. As the electronics manufacturers develop their recycling plans, WCRC will organize and advocate for them to follow - and even exceed - the preferred standards.

Local Take It Back Networks

Since it will be another year before the manufacturer programs are established, WCRC also continued working to expand “Take It Back Networks” for electronics recycling. This will mean more collection locations now and in the future when the law is implemented. Take It Back Networks are successfully operating in King, Snohomish, Pierce and Yakima Counties and – with WCRC’s help – will likely be launched in Walla Walla County.

2007 Recycling Legislation

Each year, WCRC joins with about 20 environmental and citizen groups that work together to establish legislative Priorities for a Healthy Washington. In 2007, we saw unprecedented success with the passage of all four of the priorities, including a ban on toxic flame retardants.

The 2007 legislative session also saw a host of solid waste bills introduced related to tires, bottles and cans, recycling tax incentives and more. Some were great for recycling and product stewardship, others were not. WCRC added our voice to help defeat a bill that would have allowed tires to bypass a process for determining legitimate beneficial use. And we were pleased to support a successful bill requiring vendors who sell beverages at official gatherings and outdoor sports facilities to provide recycling for the bottles and cans. Our involvement helped shift that bill from government to vendor responsibility for the recycling – a move toward product stewardship.

Additional Activities

- WCRC provided input – especially on producer responsibility - in the development of **Seattle's Zero Waste Plan**, and testified in support of that innovative Plan.
- Continued participating in a multi-stakeholder process to increase Washington's flagging recycling rate for **beverage containers**.
- Continued tracking King County's consideration of “conversion technology” – known to most of us as **incineration**.
- Collaborated with the Northwest Product Stewardship Council to develop **model framework policy for product stewardship** and participated on the Council's **Chemical Policy Committee**.
- Participated on the Computer TakeBack Campaign's Policy Committee, and provided input on **model electronics producer responsibility policy**.

- Represented citizens on **Washington's Solid Waste Advisory Committee** and on the **King County Solid Waste Advisory Committee**.

WCRC * 2021 Third Ave * Seattle * www.WasteNotWashington.org * 206-441-1790