

# Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation 2008 Program Highlights

## *Product Stewardship for Unwanted Medicines*

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



WCRC supported the expansion of a **medicine return pilot project** that securely collected and disposed over 15,000 pounds of medicines since its start-up in late 2006. The unwanted medicines are being collected at 25 Group Health pharmacies and 9 Bartell Drugs stores in 6 counties. As part of an evaluation of this project, WCRC is surveying customers and pharmacy staff in the fall of 2008.

The medicine return pilot project is scheduled to end by the close of 2008, although funding is being sought for an interim program. A long-term sustainable program will require long-term sustainable funding. That's why WCRC spearheaded a **secure medicine return bill** requiring drug manufacturers to set up and pay for a statewide program to collect and dispose unwanted medicines from households. Introduced by Rep. Dawn Morrell, the bill is modeled after a program in British Columbia operated and funded for over a dozen years by a hundred drug companies - the same companies that sell medicines here in Washington. Although the bill didn't pass in 2008, it was endorsed by diverse groups and generated important discussions. WCRC helped convene and participated in a Washington workshop on unwanted medicines, and is participating in a national stakeholder dialogue. We are carefully strategizing, collaborating, and preparing the way for successful passage of the secure medicine return bill in 2009.

WCRC advocated for household medicines to be disposed in the manner that best protects human and environmental health. We researched **green chemistry disposal** alternatives to high-temperature incineration and convened a series of conference calls with scientists, non-profits and others on this issue. A summary on Green Chemistry Pharmaceutical Disposal will be released soon.

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 convened a think tank that met to develop and prioritize upstream strategies. WCRC is now recruiting a doctor to co-author a journal article on this issue for publication in medical journals. Staff is also co-leading a national task group to strategize and develop priorities for pharmaceutical waste reduction.

To learn more or to find a drop-off location for unwanted medicines, please go to **[www.MedicineReturn.com](http://www.MedicineReturn.com)**



## ***Recycling Fluorescent Lights***

Switching to energy efficient fluorescent lighting is an important step in conserving energy and reducing greenhouse gases. However, each fluorescent bulb and tube contains a small amount of mercury, a potent



neurotoxin that needs special handling when discarded.

WCRC recently launched a new project to create “Take it Back Networks” for fluorescent lights in Pierce County and Tacoma, and is exploring expansion into additional counties.

These networks are made up of hardware stores and other retailers that provide residents with convenient opportunities to responsibly recycle our fluorescent lights. As part of this project, we will also encourage retailers to stock less toxic lighting.

In the long term, WCRC wants to see manufacturers take responsibility for collecting and recycling burned out fluorescent bulbs and tubes. To that end, WCRC participated in a national stakeholder dialogue on this issue and supported a producer responsibility recycling bill that was introduced in Washington. Although the bill didn’t pass in 2008, we expect the legislature to consider recycling of fluorescent lights in 2009 and WCRC will again be involved.

## ***Coming Soon – Washington’s Landmark Electronics Recycling Program***

In 2006, with WCRC’s leadership and lots of collaboration, Washington passed a groundbreaking electronics law requiring manufacturer-funded recycling for TVs and computers from residents, schools and small businesses. Manufacturers must fully implement the law by January 2009. The “Washington Materials Management and Financing Authority” is working to set up the recycling program on behalf of their 200 member manufacturers that sell computers and TVs into Washington. WCRC provided assistance to small businesses interested in participating as collectors in the new program. WCRC is also watchdogging the process – attending Authority meetings, providing input on the outreach campaign, and continuing to advocate for the use of responsible recyclers. The Authority has agreed to adopt voluntary preferred recycling standards developed by Department of Ecology – an important step forward.

## ***Climate Change and Product Stewardship***

In response to Governor Gregoire’s “Washington Climate Change Challenge,” the State’s Climate Advisory Team (CAT) has been on a fast track to develop timely policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The CAT created a Beyond Waste Implementation Working Group, and WCRC was at the table participating in an intense 4-month process to develop solid waste policies that will make a difference. The results were proposals to optimize the recycling collection system, establish comprehensive organics management, and create product stewardship framework legislation.

WCRC co-facilitated the work team on the product stewardship framework legislation. The idea behind framework policy is to set out the recycling program requirements for manufacturers and to set up a process for adding new products over time - possibly delegating such authority to the Department of Ecology so that there is no need to pass a new piece of legislation for each additional product. This smart and bold approach is currently used in British Columbia. Product stewardship will likely be an important part of the climate change solution. Draft analysis by EPA indicates that 35% of U.S. greenhouse gas emission in 2005 came from the provision of goods and materials.

## ***2008 Legislation & Collaboration***

This year, WCRC focused on bills related to product stewardship for unwanted medicines and fluorescent lights (described above). We also joined with about 20 environmental groups that work together to establish legislative Priorities for a Healthy Washington. In 2008, all four of the priorities passed. In addition, WCRC continued to represent citizens on Washington’s Solid Waste Advisory Committee and on the King County Solid Waste Advisory Committee.