

ABOUT WEPSI

What is WEPSI?

Electronic products are proliferating throughout American society at an accelerating rate, and with them come environmental, health and waste impacts. Under the current scenario, local governments end up with the responsibility for handling discarded electronic products, and taxpayers end up footing the bill. Governments may also respond by adopting regulations, requirements and standards that businesses must comply with.

The Western Electronic Product Stewardship Initiative (WEPSI) is a project designed to find a more effective and fair solution to this problem. WEPSI will organize multi-stakeholder dialogues throughout the Western States, which engage manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, recyclers, non-profit organizations, government and consumers. Through a collaborative process the groups will explore product stewardship models, environmentally preferable purchasing and collection infrastructure. The project will include research where needed.

Product stewardship is an environmental management strategy, whereby those who design, produce, sell, or use a given product, take responsibility for minimizing the product's environmental impact throughout all stages of the products' life cycle, in proportion to their ability to minimize those impacts.

The group of electronics products that is identified for initial consideration includes computer CPUs and monitors, computer peripherals and televisions.

What are the problems that WEPSI will address?

The stakeholders, who include all those groups listed above, have a mutual interest in developing a cooperative solution to the following challenges:

- Because much electronic equipment has not been designed to be reused or recycled, it ends up in the waste stream. The infrastructure to handle the materials that are obsolete and no longer usable is in its infancy and cannot effectively handle the current and expected volumes.
- E-products contain valuable components and materials that should be managed according to the waste management priorities – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and then, as a last resort, Dispose.
- Costs of managing these materials are currently borne by local government and taxpayers/ratepayers. These costs will rise as the e-waste stream grows.
- Many of the adverse environmental impacts associated with electronics products' (e-products) life cycles are not being addressed. Designers of e-products have made significant advances in environmentally-friendly design, but there is little economic incentive or support through marketplace mechanisms to reduce these impacts.
- E-products bear unknown and sometimes toxic substances that can pose a management burden, potential negative health effects, and long-term liability for the waste system.

How is WEPSI organized?

WEPSI organizers are representatives from federal, state and local agencies and non-profit organizations in the eight-state western region of Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. Funds from government grants as well as from NGOs have been provided to five non-profit organizations to manage the WEPSI project. These grantees are the NW Product Stewardship Council and

Recycling Advocates, organized as WEPSI-Northwest, and Global Futures Foundation, Materials for the Future Foundation and Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, organized as WEPSI-Southwest. An Executive Steering Committee, that includes representatives from the funding agencies and organizations, governs WEPSI activities.

What is the WEPSI mission?

WEPSI's mission is to engage the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders in order to design a new system and approach that will:

- Minimize environmental impacts throughout the life cycle of electronic products.
- Keep electronic equipment out of the waste stream without ratepayers and taxpayers having to pay the full costs.

Why should stakeholders participate in the WEPSI dialogues?

The implementation of an electronic product stewardship system will mean new business opportunities for handling end-of-life products, new practices by electronics manufacturers, and a new relationship between government and industry. WEPSI will contribute to the design of this new system both nationally and in our region, and those who may participate in the business opportunities are invited to engage in its design.

Moreover, WEPSI will provide a channel to carry the ideas and input from western stakeholders to the National Electronic Product Stewardship Initiative (NEPSI). NEPSI is a national multi-stakeholder process for achieving agreement to enhance product stewardship for electronics. This EPA-supported national initiative was launched in April 2001 and its timing will parallel WEPSI.

What is the intended outcome of WEPSI?

WEPSI seeks to develop stakeholder agreement on the characteristics and features of a sustainable product stewardship system which:

- internalizes motivations to design and produce environmentally-friendly products, rather than simply to mandate actions, and
- recovers electronic products for reuse and recycling at the end of their useful lives through means that are consistent and practical throughout the Western States.

The agreement will be formalized in an Action Plan, which highlights activities that government, industry and non-profit organizations in the West can take to catalyze market and infrastructure development for product stewardship.