

BACKGROUNDER: EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) is an approach to environmental policy where producers and distributors assume responsibility for managing their product waste, rather than placing the burden on municipalities. The overarching goals of EPR are to minimize environmental impacts, maximize environmental benefits, promote the transfer of end-of-life responsibility for the product and/or material to the producer, and encourage design for environment. EPR is currently used in some Canadian jurisdictions for a few products (e.g., paint or used oil). It is used on a wide scale basis internationally.

The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) is working with stakeholders to expand the use of EPR in a broader and more uniform fashion. A Canada-wide action plan for EPR would provide guidance on the development and implementation of EPR programs.

Products and materials that could be targeted include packaging, printed materials, compact fluorescent lights and other lamps containing mercury, electronics and electrical products, household hazardous wastes and automotive products. Once EPR programs mature, they could be expanded to include construction and demolition materials, furniture, textiles, carpeting and appliances containing ozone-depleting substances.

Packaging

There is interest in reducing packaging waste in Canada and promoting more sustainable packaging choices at all life-cycle stages – from raw material acquisition to disposal, reuse and/or recycling. As part of the EPR initiative, the CCME is exploring the development of a Canada-wide strategy for sustainable packaging. The strategy would aim to encourage more sustainable packaging choices by businesses and consumers and, through EPR, ensure systems are in place to recover packaging materials. The strategy would apply to packaging used by manufacturers and distributors of a wide range of products including food and beverages, and packaging used by retailers, restaurants and the transport industry.

Future work on the EPR strategy could include many components, including:

- requirements for packaging;
- negotiated agreements with specific industry sectors to reduce packaging and improve sustainability;
- consistent guidelines, standards and/or visual identification for packaging that includes recycled content or that is reusable, recyclable and compostable; and
- sustainability criteria for packaging that reflects the entire life cycle.

A focused consultation program, including a face-to-face meeting of invited experts plus a web-based consultation open to the public, will be held in 2009-10.