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Update: Connecticut moves forward with mattress recycling

The first-of-its kind law forces manufacturers to collect, recycle discarded mattresses in the state

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By Chrissy Kadleck

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The nightmare of mattress management will soon be put to bed for Connecticut cities and towns that have struggled with the costly and cumbersome disposal of these slumber surfaces.

Connecticut has become the first in the nation to pass a mattress stewardship law that will establish an industry-led recycling council and non-profit organization to manage discarded kings and queens as they transition to their final resting place.

The historic law, signed by Gov. Dannel Malloy on May 28 after being passed by the state legislature, will result in an estimated \$1.3 million cost savings for local cash-strapped governments and will create new opportunities for recycling businesses in the state, said Scott Cassel, CEO and founder of the [Product Stewardship Institute](#), which worked with the early leaders of the mattress recycling movement, particularly in Hartford.

"This is just a fabulous step in the right direction for the mattress industry. It shows a leadership on the stewardship issue and it's saving a lot of money for local governments in Connecticut," Cassel said, adding that state officials estimate that municipalities have to deal with more than 175,000 discarded mattresses each year.

Most of those are currently shipped to out-of-state landfills or waste-to-energy facilities. Some are even discarded on the streets, according to the [Connecticut Conference of Municipalities](#), which estimates that on any given day there are 10,000 abandoned mattresses littered around the state.

Mattresses are made up of recyclable metal, foam, cotton and cloth but the disassembly process needed for recycling is very labor intensive, making it cost prohibitive, said Chris Hudgins, vice president of government relations and policy at the [International Sleep Products Association](#), which supported and helped craft the bill.

He said the mattress industry has been working to come up with a solution to managing the bulky, problematic waste stream.

"It's really a space issue. They are costly to ship and move around but they can also get caught in machinery if you're trying to incinerate them. And if they go to a landfill, because they are lighter and bulky, over time they rise to the top," said Hudgins whose organization represents nearly 700 mattress manufacturers and suppliers throughout the world.

ISPA worked with policymakers in the state, including the [Department of Energy and Environmental Protection](#) (DEEP) and the city of Hartford, to develop the mattress recycling legislation they say will allow residents to easily recycle mattresses in a way that is good for the environment, consumers and industry.

"We think [this new law] is a good model for states that are considering such approaches. We supported it throughout the process and we are happy that it passed," he said.

The new law requires the mattress industry to develop a single stewardship organization that will provide free collection and recycling services to municipalities, which include storage containers for municipalities to aggregate mattresses at transfer stations, Cassel said.

Led by a council comprised of all mattress manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers in Connecticut, the organization is charged with designing a mattress recycling or disposal stewardship program that must be submitted to DEEP by July 1, 2014. The effort will be financed by a small fee on all mattresses sold in the state.

"What ISPA will do is create this new non-profit organization that will be administered and run, which will develop this plan. This new organization will have all the responsibilities of establishing a fee, collecting the money and using that money to contract with recyclers and haulers to make sure that the mattresses are properly recycled," Hudgins said.

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The fee is expected to be between \$8 and \$12 per mattress based on preliminary research, Hudgins said.

"We hope to keep it to the single digits," he said. "Retailers will collect the fee at point of sale. There will be a line-item charge for mattress recycling so it is visible and consumer will know what they are paying for and they will know they can recycle their mattress. We wanted it to be very clear and transparent."

Hudgins said the fee will offset the cost of recycling.

"At most of the recycling facilities today, mattresses have to be done by hand and that's basically a couple guys with box cutters who basically filet the thing," he said. "That's why there needs to be a fee. The labor costs exceed the value of the components that can be recycled."

Two mattress recyclers have set up shop in the state ready to start capitalizing on the new law, Cassel said.

"Their economic model is based on getting a good supply of mattresses and this law will increase the amount of useable mattresses that can be recycled so it's good for both of these recycling businesses and for that reason it's an economic development tool," he said. "These [extended producer responsibility] laws give certainty to recycling businesses that there is going to be an increased supply of high-quality material."

Connecticut is the first state to have a law on the books, but there is legislation pending in California and Rhode Island.

"There are many other states interested in mattress stewardship legislation, particularly in the Northeast where it is a priority," Cassel said. "The next step will be to develop a reasonable model for the country that other states can adopt and adapt. It will save the industry money and there is no need to have 50 different laws in 50 different states."

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