



The Product Stewardship Institute developed this document to assist local officials and other leaders in rural areas in maximizing the use of existing product stewardship programs, and in establishing new programs where none exist yet. The recommendations included here come from PSI's own outreach and education work in rural areas, as well as the work of other organizations and agencies that have carried out various types of outreach programs to support product stewardship.

Product Stewardship represents a new way of thinking about the roles and responsibilities of government, industry, and consumers in managing solid waste and the products and packaging that comprise it. Product stewardship is a policy approach that ensures that all those involved in the lifecycle of a product share responsibility for reducing its health and environmental impacts, with producers bearing primary financial responsibility. Within the context of solid waste management, this means that the responsibility for managing products at the end of their useful life should not rest solely on local governments and rate payers, but also with the companies that benefited from the sale of those products.



Best Practices for Increasing Product Stewardship Participation in Rural Areas

Develop a network of committed local partners

A single individual, such as a government official, business leader, or environmental advocate, can increase participation in product stewardship programs within his or her small sphere of influence, but it takes a strong coalition of partners to generate the momentum needed to increase participation in product stewardship across an entire community. In rural areas, many types of organizations are involved in disposal education and collection of hazardous waste, and having the backing of a diverse coalition of respected community leaders will lead to resident buy-in. Active entities might include:

- Solid waste and recycling agencies
- Businesses that sell or handle the priority products
- Environment and wildlife advocacy groups
- School teachers, administration, and student groups
- Law enforcement, fire, and emergency services
- Associations of companies and individuals that handle priority products
- State and local chapters of NAHMMA and SWANA
- Keep America Beautiful state and local chapters



Know your audience and media outlets

How does word spread around your town? Is the local newspaper well-read? What radio station do people listen to? Do people use facebook and twitter? If you don't know of the answers to these questions, conduct a survey of your community to identify the best avenues for outreach.



Face-to-face communication is best

While time, labor, and cost-intensive, no outreach method is as effective as having an actual conversation with a stakeholder. These encounters provide an opportunity for you to answer questions and convey more detail than is possible in an advertisement, and the individual is likely to take topics much more seriously than he or she would if the same information were presented elsewhere.

Sign up participants on the spot!

If you have started a conversation with a potential partner and have gained their commitment to support product stewardship in your community, follow up then and there by getting him or her to sign up as a participant. This might be as much as filling out a registration form to participate as a collector in an existing product take back program, or as little as signing up to receive more information about supporting future outreach campaigns.

Provide an incentive to new collectors

If possible, provide some kind of incentive to draw additional participation. Other than cash, some popular incentives include coupons to local retail stores and restaurants, which could be provided for free or at a discount through project partners. Many pilot programs, research studies, and PSI's own experiences have shown that product stewardship programs are more successful at bringing on new retailers, establishing new collection points, and increasing material collected when businesses are offered an incentive for participating.

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How Can Product Stewardship Programs Help My Community?



Many common products including electronics, auto switches, batteries, fluorescent lamps, and mercury thermostats contain hazardous substances, such as mercury, cadmium, and lead. When these products are disposed as solid waste, the toxic substances can accumulate in landfill leachate, which can cause water pollution. Pharmaceuticals flushed down the toilet or treated as solid waste can also pollute the water, and pesticides can migrate from farms and gardens to ground and surface water. When not properly disposed, motor oil can have a significant impact on water quality, too. Collecting and safely managing these waste products costs money and is a significant burden on local governments.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 71% of the municipal solid waste stream in 2010 consisted of products and their packaging, and that 1.6 million tons of hazardous waste is generated in American homes each year. It is significantly safer from an environmental perspective to divert these products from the waste stream through special collections. Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of toxic products from households and small businesses are currently managed safely, and rural areas are often the last populations serviced.



Fortunately a number of industry-funded product stewardship programs are already in place for a many of these common products including electronics, batteries, tires, and building materials. Some of these programs were created through legislation, other programs were voluntarily set up by manufacturers and retailers to collect and recycle or safely dispose of their products. Both mandatory and voluntary systems are underutilized nationally, particularly in rural areas.



By taking maximum advantage of these existing industry-funded collection programs, local communities can increase environmental benefits of managing these materials safely, without increasing costs for local governments. Over time, product stewardship can save governments millions of dollars by shifting product management costs to manufacturers and consumers, and offering efficient waste management programs that involve all key stakeholders.

The benefits of product stewardship are two-fold:

**1) Protecting the environment,
and**

2) Reducing the financial burden on government and taxpayers

Why Do Rural Communities Need Product Stewardship?

Significant financial and technical support is needed to improve the safe management and collection of household hazardous waste (HHW) in rural regions. While many rural areas have lower populations, on a per capita basis they generate a significant amount of HHW, very little of which is diverted from the waste stream. HHW from household *and* small businesses is unregulated in all states except California and in a few other states under limited circumstances.

Rural communities face unique challenges in managing this complex waste stream as they often have a smaller tax base and resources to manage HHW, and simultaneous face higher collection and recycling costs on a per capita basis.

Safe management of HHW is also more critical as rural populations are often more dependent on groundwater. If improperly disposed, HHW can contaminate groundwater, often resulting in costly cleanups. Unfortunately, the problem of water contamination is common throughout the United States, and many communities have issued fish consumption advisories due to mercury contamination for water bodies. Because HHW contains the same toxic materials as commercial and industrial hazardous waste and it should be managed with a comparable level of care; however, in practice in rural areas much this waste is entering the municipal solid waste stream.

