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Waste Age

California Approves Tougher Recycling Regulations for Mercury Thermostats

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California has approved mercury thermostat regulations that set high targets for recycling and collecting used thermostats.

The regulations established by the California Office of Administrative Law also establish a means for determining the number of mercury thermostats available for collection and set a baseline collection rate, according to a news release from the Boston-based

Product Stewardship Institute Inc. (PSI).

PSI said the new regulations strengthen California's 2008 mercury thermostat extended producer responsibility (EPR) law, which can lead to the state improving its per capita collection rate.

Beginning July 1, thermostat manufacturers must collect and recycle 30 percent of the total number of mercury thermostats available in the state for 2013, or 32,500 thermostats for the second half of the year, according to a news release from the California Environmental Protection Agency's Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). The performance targets increase each year to reach a 75-percent recycling rate by 2017 (or 147,750 mercury-containing thermostats), which meets with California's overall goal to reduce, recycle, or compost 75 percent of solid waste generated in the state by 2020.

The DTSC can require the Thermostat Recycling Corp. (TRC), the stewardship organization representing thermostat manufacturers that collects the thermostats, to offer a financial incentive to increase thermostat collection. California is the first state in the country to require a financial incentive administratively and not through legislation, as is the case with EPR laws in Maine and Vermont.

"By setting recycling rates and establishing a methodology for determining the number of thermostats available for collection, these regulations establish California as a leader on this issue and serve as a model for other states to follow," said Scott Cassel, CEO of the PSI.

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