

# **SUBGROUP TOPIC BACKGROUND PAPER**

## **Western Electronic Product Stewardship Initiative**

**Topic:** The Recycling System

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**Topic Description** This subgroup will examine the existing recycling system for electronic products in the Northwest, and needs for the future, including:

- Economic and practical realities of e-scrap recycling
- Collection, transport and recycling costs
- Environmentally sound recycling practices
- Overseas waste shipment
- Material tracking
- Information exchange for product stewardship

**How will SWOT be used to address this topic?** The current recycling opportunities and infrastructure will be defined by the group through research and interviews. Then the group will brainstorm the ideal role of recycling in a product stewardship system. This ideal will be evaluated against the existing system, determining the strengths and weaknesses of both. The existing system will be scrutinized to find unrealized opportunities and its threats to success. In addition, opportunities and threats will be determined for the ideal recycling program.

### **Key Questions to be Answered (samples)**

- What recoverable and recyclable materials are in this waste stream?
- What collection process best facilitates reuse?
- What are some of the barriers to material extraction?
- What parts of the recycling process should be addressed locally? Regionally? And nationally?
- What are the criteria for environmentally sound recycling practices?
- Where are the markets?
- Does the value of the extracted material justify any transportation costs?
- What information flow do we have to track recovered material through the markets, including international?
- Where are the costs: in collection? Transportation? Processing?
- What infrastructure should be designed to facilitate information flow to system designers?

### **Key Subgroup Tasks**

The subgroup will have a staff support person for recording and research. The subgroup may choose to meet in person, via conference call or via e-mail exchange.

The subgroup will:

- Develop a brief topic SWOT (regional and national) – Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats.
- Identify subject matter experts to speak to M-S meeting.
- Prepare a presentation for the multi-stakeholder meeting #3 on the SWOT, including a speaker.
- Define action items and associated costs for the multi-stakeholder meeting #5.
- Identify the people and other resources needed to execute the actions.

## CONSIDERATIONS COMMON TO ALL TOPICS

The following issues should be considered in evaluating the current situation relative to the topic. Not all of these issues may apply to all topics.

- ▶ Convenience to the public
- ▶ Motivation for public participation
- ▶ Level of product recovery
- ▶ Source reduction/reuse/recycling hierarchy
- ▶ Efficiency of the system as a whole
- ▶ Signal for producers to improve product design for environment
- ▶ Signal to consumers about the implications of their choices (e.g. Should the end-of-life cost be visible or invisible to consumers?)
- ▶ Applies to all types of electronic products being considered
- ▶ Recovery of new, historic<sup>1</sup> and orphaned<sup>2</sup> product
- ▶ Environmentally responsible recycling
- ▶ Flexibility for regional and geographic differences
- ▶ All costs of the system are covered
- ▶ Costs are allocated equitably
- ▶ Everyone shares responsibility who should be responsible
- ▶ Minimize free riders
- ▶ Feedback to responsible parties
- ▶ Publicly or privately managed

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<sup>1</sup> Old product that was designed and manufactured in the past, presumably with little thought to end-of-life management.

<sup>2</sup> Old product that was manufactured by a company that is now out-of-business and therefore cannot take responsibility for their product.