



## Paint Stewardship Means Less Government and Cost, and More Recycling Options

Heidi Sanborn

**PAINT ACCOUNTS FOR ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF MOST HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE PROGRAMS' DISPOSAL COSTS. The California Product Stewardship Council has influenced the development of a new State program to manage leftover paint that will impact every paint purchaser and user in the State and could be a model for others as well.**

### FOR MANY IN THE U.S., THIS WINTER WAS A TOUGH

one and when the rain and snow stop, the spring maintenance begins, which usually includes painting and cleaning out the basement and garage, which often have stored years of leftover paint. That is when homeowners ask—do I throw it in the trash? Is there somewhere I can bring this paint? Does it have any value? Can it be recycled?

The California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) is completing a three county project in California that is informing and assisting the paint manufacturers with a new State program to manage leftover paint that will impact every paint purchaser and user in the State and could be a model for others as well. CPSC is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the use of Product Stewardship policy for problem waste products. Leftover paint is a very big economic and environmental problem for local governments across California and in most States. In this article, we will explain what the problem is, how it is being solved in California, and how that information can be used across the country.

CPSC is the primary grant partner to San Joaquin County along with Tehama and San Francisco Counties on a statewide grant from the Department of Resources, Recovery and Recycling (CalRecycle). We branded the grant work project team as the “Be Paint Wise Partnership.” The primary goals are:

- To educate consumers about how to buy the right amount of paint
- Establish paint “swaps” where leftover paint can be left for others who need it
- Establish convenient take-back locations for paint recycling
- Encourage purchase of recycled-content paint
- Develop a Statewide product stewardship program for paint, which will be handed over to the paint manufacturers

The lessons learned from this grant and the results of focus groups and barrier studies are explained as follows.

### The Paint Problem – The Stewardship Solution

More than 74 million gallons of paint are sold each year in California, according to CalRecycle. But not all paint sold is being used, which creates leftover paint that must be properly managed. Because there are not enough convenient ways to recycle paint, contractors and others store enormous amounts of leftover paint in garages and on their property, which can have negative environmental impacts as seen in **Figure 1, page 58** where the new homeowner placed an ad in a local publication offering “all the paint you can take for \$5”.

Landfilling leftover liquid paint is banned in California, so local governments have been collecting paint through household hazardous waste (HHW) facilities since the early 1990s. Although HHW facilities are only seeing a small percentage of leftover paint—approximately 5%—they still collect 2 million gallons each year that costs approximately \$27 million annually to manage. With low recovery rates and high cost, California needed a better option, so the State looked to product stewardship legislation as a sustainable funding and management solution.

Product Stewardship, otherwise known as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), is a policy approach to managing many types of problem waste products such as paint. The approach transfers the cost of product waste management to the producers, and ultimately they pass those costs on to the consumers, so the costs are no longer born by the general public through increased taxes or garbage rates. The approach is used around the world as a way to stop socializing the costs of expensive waste products and allows consumers to see the full cost of the product and choose if that is the right purchase for them.

In 2010, California became only the second state in the nation to pass stewardship legislation for



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**Figure 1**  
Photo taken at a home near Oroville, CA in 2009. Images courtesy of California Product Stewardship Council.

managing leftover architectural paint when former Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 1343 (Huffman) into law. Because of this law, which was supported by paint manufacturers, retailers and local governments, starting July 1, 2012,

the paint industry will begin operating a Statewide stewardship program for architectural paint through a non-profit called PaintCare. PaintCare is also responsible for Oregon's paint stewardship program which started July 2010 and along with the lessons learned from the Be Paint Wise Partnership project, both will provide the foundation for California's future program.

### What Does the Public Think?

The project started with a focus group study to understand what the public knew about paint as a problem, where to bring it at end of life and to determine why they overbuy. Two focus groups were conducted in Sacramento and the major findings were:

- Use bullet points in messaging
- Message should come from a variety of sources
- Prefer message at point of sale
- Only 1 in 20 knew where HHW facility was
- Most consumers don't equate themselves as the funders of "local government"

CPSC concluded that the public needs help when purchasing the right amount of paint, they do not read paper instructions and want all their information about proper management at the point-of-sale, they don't know where the HHW facilities are and won't go that far out of their way, and they don't trust government or industry so the messaging should be from a partnership. These findings led the CPSC to develop the partnership message and logo, ensure that public education materials on how to buy the right amount were at the point-of-sale, and that they needed more convenient collection locations such as retailers.

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Vision's employee picks up paint from Red Bluff Paint Mart. Images courtesy of California Product Stewardship Council.

### Paint Recycling Becomes Much Easier

The project was successful at recruiting 17 retailers in the three counties to be paint collection locations. CPSC learned that the public responded to two things: advertising the program and convenience. Some retailers stated that if there was an ad in the newspaper or radio, they might have 100 phone

calls in one day asking about paint drop-off. They love the program and have collected more than 9,000 gallons in just one year of the program in the three counties. The future Statewide program will target "architectural paint," which the law defines as interior and exterior architectural coatings sold in containers of five gallons or less for commercial or homeowner use, but does not include aerosol spray paint or architectural coatings purchased for industrial or original equipment manufacturer use. Contractors and do-it-yourselfers alike will benefit from the new program.

"Our goal is to create a network of take-back sites throughout the State to make it easier for do-it-yourselfers and contractors to recycle leftover paint," explains PaintCare Executive Director, Alison Keane. "We're currently working with stakeholders to understand the current infrastructure

and develop the parameters for establishing collection sites." The program will include many existing HHW programs and is expected to increase the total number of collection sites throughout the State significantly, giving consumers convenient, local options for paint recycling. "Ideally, we'd like you to be able to recycle leftover paint at the same place you purchase new paint," adds Keane.

Consumers can expect an increase in the cost of new paint purchases in order to fund the take-back program. Although California's fee structure hasn't been determined yet, it is expected to be similar to Oregon's per-container assessment fee structure:

- \$0.35 for pints and quarts
- \$0.75 for one gallon containers
- \$1.60 for two to five gallon containers.

Abby Boudouris, Household Hazardous Waste Coordinator with



Ace Hardware Store display for Visions Green Seal Certified recycled content paint. Top Right: Paint swap location at HHW facility in San Joaquin County.

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facilitated by the Product Stewardship Institute. The project was funded by CalRecycle (formerly the California Integrated Waste Management Board). To achieve Green Seal certification, the new paint has to be filtered, pH tested and, ultimately, must pass the same performance tests as virgin paint. Green Seal certification means that a product has been tested according to science-based procedures, that works as well or better than others in its class, and that has been evaluated without bias or conflict of interest. Meeting these standards of quality and performance is no small achievement.

### Paint SWAPS: Highest and Best Use

The highest and best use for paint, and the most cost-effective way to manage leftovers, is to give it to someone who can use it. Many HHW facilities and Habitat for Humanity locations offer a “paint swap” location where people can leave usable paint to be used by others. CPSC was successful at establishing paint swaps in one retail store and at one landfill and one transfer station. We learned that retailers have many fears about becoming a swap location including the fear of offering free paint to compete against purchase of new paint. The only retailer we were able to convince to become a swap location did so under two conditions—it was only advertised to low-income groups and the shelf wasn’t in the front of the store. Even with those conditions met, the storeowner has had problems with people wanting specific colors and getting mad at him when they are not available for free.

### Project Success

In short, the Be Paint Wise Partnership project has been a huge success and

CPSC has learned a lot of information and developed models that can be used by others across the country. This is an exciting time for product stewardship. California local governments are finally going to see some financial relief. Because paint is costing local governments over \$27 million per year to manage, this program will have tremendous Statewide impact. But the benefits go beyond cost savings for taxpayers and garbage ratepayers. CPSC has already seen an increase in green jobs as California’s paint recyclers gear up to handle more paint, so the Statewide program is really a win-win-win for consumers, taxpayers and the economy. | **WA**

*Heidi Sanborn helped found and is the Executive Director of the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) based in Sacramento, CA. Heidi speaks internationally on producer responsibility and is widely recognized as the expert on EPR policy in the U.S. She can be reached at (916) 480-9010 or via e-mail at [heidi@calpsc.org](mailto:heidi@calpsc.org).*

*For a complete listing of all CPSC project work, visit the CPSC project page at [www.calpsc.org/projects/SanJoaquin-HD17.html](http://www.calpsc.org/projects/SanJoaquin-HD17.html)*

*To find a location near you that will take back paint from businesses, visit [www.earth911](http://www.earth911) and search by zip code.*

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