

National Workshop on Discarded Electronics

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The National Workshop on Discarded Electronics was held in Ottawa on March 18 2003. The workshop was hosted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) to consult with municipalities across Canada on the issue of managing this rapidly growing portion of the waste stream; it being discarded electronics. Industry has come to the table with a proposed national plan and some Provinces are gearing up. FCM sees where there is an opportunity for the

municipalities to play a role in the design and delivery of an efficient national stewardship program on discarded electronics and to ensure the program is sensitive to municipal needs.

The end-of-life electronics management is driven by the volume of used and discarded information and communication equipment going into the landfill sites. In addition to the quantities of waste, there is a number of toxic substances that require special handling, and precious metals are being lost. As well the manufacturing industry was not impressed with the publicity it received from a television documentary showing electronic equipment being bashed in China to retrieve the precious metals.

There is a number of players and associations involved in this process and I will try to explain who they are and to some degree their involvement.

Lura Consulting has a contract with the FCM which includes three initiatives

1. An on-line survey which will determine municipal views on discarded electronics product management.
2. Regional consultations are being held to identify regional views on a national program;
3. A day-long national workshop to be held in Ottawa to consider the information gathered from the first two initiatives and to develop a national municipal position on discarded electronics product management.

Laura Consulting was the facilitator for this workshop.

In October of 2000, Environment Canada released a report on IT and telecom waste in Canada. Soon after, Environment Canada, Industry Canada and Natural Resources Canada approached the Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC) to inform the industry of the situation and to discuss the possibility of a national industry program for the take-back of electronic equipment. ITAC represents some 1300 companies in the computing and telecommunications hardware, software, services and electronic content sectors.

After several steering committees and reports ITAC and the Electro-Federation Canada (EFC) established a formal partnership to continue work on an industry-lead national program for recovering and recycling electronics. EFC is a national industry association that represents over 225 member companies in the electrical, electronics and telecommunication industries in Canada.

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From this partnership “Electronics Product Stewardship Canada” or EPSC was formed. EPSC is a multi stakeholder initiative which plans to address the end of life management of IT and consumer electronics products in Canada. The Industry partners includes Apple, Brother, Canon, Dell, Epson, Hewlett-Packard, Hitachi, IBM, Lexmark, LG Electronics, Panasonic, Sanyo, Sharp, Sony, Thomson MultiMedia, Toshiba and the association partners of ITAC and EFC.

Electronics Product Stewardship Canada is not much different than the Multi-Material Stewardship Board (MMSB) here in Newfoundland and Labrador, except this would be done on

a national basis. It would have a deposit fee on electronic equipment when it is purchased which would go to EPSC. EPSC then would take the responsibility for the collection, transportation and processing of the electronics equipment at the end of its useful life. EPSC's current plans would be to have a deposit on personal computers, monitors, television sets, laptop computers and printers. Information on EPSC will be attached to this report.

Considering that the electronics industry has taken the lead on recycling of their electronic products the FCM and Government Agencies see this as one way in solving the problem with this waste stream. EPSC is a national organization and would like to see a national program to avoid multiple regulations that would be associated with Provinces and Territories having their own regulations. They would also like to see a standard environmental fee across Canada for each major product. The problem is jurisdiction. Those products are now going to Municipal landfill sites with most of the regulations being governed by the Provinces. The Federal Government controls the imports of electronic equipment but considering electronic equipment is not hazardous material it will be difficult for the Federal Government to restrict what happens to it.

The workshop commenced with a presentation by ESPC and how industry could implement a recycling program. FCM representing municipalities wanted feedback from representatives at the workshop on endorsing the industry-driven national program or how the program could be modified to make it acceptable by all levels of government. All representatives felt that a program is needed because of the concerns with this type of waste and would recommend an industry-driven program. Convincing all levels of Government to go with a national program with uniform regulations and fees across Canada may be a hard sell.

EPSC is planning to consult with the stakeholders across Canada with one session in Atlantic Canada in April. The Province and MMSB should be represented at that session. An action plan from our workshop will be forwarded from Lura Consulting in the next week. After the workshop group gets an opportunity to review and comment on the things discussed at the conference it will be forwarded to the FCM's Board of Directors.

For more information on EPSC you can go in on their website at www.epsc.ca

