

Fighting Toxic Pollution and Promoting Product Stewardship

Over the past 20 years, the Natural Resources Council of Maine has helped reduce the threat to public health and the environment posed by toxic chemicals. In 1989, we worked with organized labor to secure passage of the Toxics Use Reduction Act. In 2004 we wrote Maine's pioneering electronic waste (e-waste) law, which holds manufacturers responsible for paying end-of-life recovery costs for obsolete computers. We also helped pass first-in-the-nation laws that phased out mercury-containing products and toxic flame retardant chemicals, and we worked with a broad coalition to secure passage of Maine's Kid-Safe Products law. And in 2010, NRCM championed a landmark piece of legislation designed to fundamentally alter our approach to solid waste – by systematically identifying products that can be removed from the waste stream and recycled responsibly, preferably into new products, with the original manufacturers helping pay for and manage these “product stewardship” programs. This is an exciting time for policy in these areas, and NRCM staff and Maine are on the leading edge.



The Year Ahead

Standing Up Against Chemical Industry Lobbyists:

NRCM has won a series of big victories to reduce toxic pollution in Maine, even in the face of heavy-handed tactics by out-of-state industry lobbyists. NRCM Board Member Elisa Boxer-Cook (right) is among the compelling witnesses who have helped to fight for our public health and a safe environment. We currently are in a battle to ensure implementation of the Kid-Safe Products Act, designed to remove health-threatening toxic chemicals from consumer products. Maine's Department of Environmental Protection correctly has identified



bisphenol-A (BPA) as a proposed “priority chemical” for regulation in consumer products. The science overwhelmingly supports elimination of this health risk, yet industry lobbyists are fighting against us. As an example, the American Chemistry Council's Steven Hentges (left) flew to Maine to lobby against the proposed restriction, and conducted a series of media interviews. But NRCM and our coalition have spoken with reporters too, and mobilized Maine people, health professionals, and technical experts. We'll keep up the

pressure to phase out BPA as the issue heads to the Maine Legislature in early 2011, and as the Board of Environmental Protection brings forward additional priority chemicals.

Building Alliances with Other States: Because Maine has been such a leader on policies to remove toxic chemicals from consumer products, allies in other states actively seek our legislative and campaign advice. For example, 20 states and New York City have followed Maine's lead in

adopting e-waste legislation. We will continue to play this role of “policy incubator,” so that our legislative successes spread across the country and eventually result in national policy changes.

Implementing Product Stewardship: Canada and Europe are far ahead of the U.S. in establishing policies that drastically reduce the volume of solid waste sent to landfills. The approach being used is called “product stewardship,” and it involves producer-funded collection and recycling programs for a broad range of products. Manufacturers in the U.S. have fought against product stewardship, and until recently it was considered a dead concept – even as multinational corporations complied with these requirements internationally. But then, at NRCM’s



urging, Maine passed a product stewardship e-waste program, which has now collected more than eight million pounds of electronic waste in Maine. An even bigger breakthrough came in spring 2010, when NRCM – working with State Representative Melissa Innes (D-Yarmouth) – secured passage of a “framework” product stewardship bill that won broad support, including from the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. With that bill now in place, NRCM is moving ahead aggressively with a product stewardship working group to identify product categories that would be good candidates for the program. Household hazardous waste, packaging, carpets, used paint, appliances, additional electronic equipment, and construction material all could be channeled into product stewardship programs, turned into new products, and kept out of Maine’s landfills – saving taxpayers money and protecting our environment at the same time.



Other NRCM Toxics Policy Action

- Advocating for federal toxics policy reform. The nation’s Toxics Substances Control Act (TSCA) was adopted more than 30 years ago and has never been overhauled – but it should be. The law doesn’t protect us from the 80,000 chemicals introduced into the market since the law was enacted. Maine’s two senators will be critical to passage of a reform bill.
- Providing public presentations on Maine’s product stewardship program and opportunities, in order to build awareness and interest – particularly from the business sector. Canada has achieved broad support from businesses interested in the job-creating potential of product stewardship programs.



NRCM’s Matt Prindiville speaking at bill signing of Maine’s landmark 2010 product stewardship law.

- Fighting against efforts to weaken Maine’s toxics and product stewardship laws. Our successes here and in other states have caused the American Chemistry Council and a conservative group called the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) to create a “grassroots” campaign to introduce “rollback” bills and work to block further spread of these bills to other states.

