

THE PROBLEM

Connecticut continues to struggle with its waste disposal system. In July 2022 the largest incinerator facility in Hartford closed, leaving many towns scrambling to find other options, and sending hundreds of thousands of additional tons of waste out-of-state to landfills. Regional landfill capacity is scheduled to shrink by 40% in the next 5 years. Relying on other states is a temporary, stop-gap solution that puts our communities and taxpayers at the mercy of other states for regulations, increased costs and environmental impacts. Municipalities continue to attempt to manage the volatility of costs and the ever-changing landscape of trash.

Funding for many municipal recycling programs is unsustainable. Changes in the economy have escalated costs of mixed (single stream) recycling. At this date, some communities are paying more for curbside recycling, than they are for trash. Packaging changes and single use items have increased the amount of trash due to limited recycling options. Costs to manage items that are hard to dispose of, such as tires and carpeting are rising. Many items, like batteries, smoke detectors and hazardous waste, should be removed from the waste stream but have few or no recovery programs.

A POTENTIAL SOLUTION

We must reduce and rethink how we handle waste. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), if implemented correctly, can help address our trash problem. EPR programs seek to hold manufacturers accountable for their product and packaging waste.

CT has been at the forefront in supporting and implementing EPR programs. Leaders have brought diverse stakeholders together to develop EPR programs for electronics, mattresses, paint, and thermostats. Last year, CT became the first state in the nation to pass EPR legislation for gas cylinders. These programs have had a significant impact, saving municipalities millions of dollars in disposal costs; creating jobs; and developing reliable, more effective, financially stable, and environmentally sustainable programs for these items. In addition, by involving producers in product disposal, EPR encourages them to redesign their products with the environment in mind.



Tire EPR – Illegally dumped tires have long plagued rivers, forests and parks causing severe environmental problems, and removal and disposal has cost municipalities, taxpayers and private landowners several thousands of dollars each year. The Connecticut River Conservancy has removed over 11,000 tires from the Connecticut River Watershed in the last 15 years. Tire EPR incentivizes manufacturers to find innovative ways to recycle tires, and rethink tire design and engineering. Introduction of tire EPR in Ontario virtually eliminated illegal tire dumping, and can do the same here in CT.

Paper and Packaging EPR – Residential recycling programs, municipal or private, need sustained financial support to maintain and expand collection. EPR for packaging can include a fee structure to hold manufacturers accountable for their packaging waste and incentivize them to redesign their packaging. CT DEEP has estimated that EPR for packaging could reduce municipal solid waste by 190,000 tons and save municipalities up to \$40 million annually. But an EPR for packaging law will only have the desired impact on our waste stream if it imposes mandatory, enforceable reduction targets and adequate oversight on packaging manufacturers and consumer brands. And to protect communities and the climate, EPR for packaging must exclude toxic false solutions like "advanced recycling."

MORE INFORMATION

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