

There are problems with current systems, but there is hope for the future.

With the passing of Governor's Executive Order 02-03, calling for sustainable practices, state agencies must now establish biennial plans to reduce or eliminate waste and shift to non-toxic, recycled and remanufactured materials in state purchasing and construction. To find more information about current efforts to reduce waste and toxins at Ecology and other state agencies, please visit the following Web sites:

Ⓞ Department of Ecology's Beyond Waste Web site: www.ecy.wa.gov/beyondwaste/

Ⓞ Department of Ecology's sustainability Web site: www.ecy.wa.gov/sustainability/

Ⓞ Governor's Web site for promoting sustainable business practices: www.ofm.wa.gov/sustainability/index.htm

Ⓞ Department of General Administration's sustainability Web site: www.ga.wa.gov/sustainability/

To read the full document on the myths, listed in this brochure, please request publication #04-04-015 or go to: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0404015.html>

If you require this publication in an alternate format, please contact the Hazardous Waste & Toxics Reduction Program at 360-407-6700, or TTY (for the speech or hearing impaired) 711 or 800-833-6388.

The Future of Waste and Toxins in Washington



In nature there is no waste. What isn't needed by one plant or animal is used by another.

Humans, however, generate large quantities of waste, some very toxic. We spend valuable time, energy and money trying to keep it from harming us and the environment.



publication # 04-04-016

Myths and Misconceptions

Washington has made tremendous progress in managing wastes and toxins during the past few decades, but rising population, combined with more disposable products and synthetic chemicals, places increased demands on our communities. Will our current solutions ensure a healthy environment for future generations?

We hold many misconceptions about waste, the use and disposal of toxic chemicals, and the relationship between environmental health and economic vitality.

Consider the following myths ...

Myth Number 1

If a product is on the shelf, it is safe

When we purchase a product, most of us assume that it has been tested and declared safe for the intended purpose. What we may not know is:

- Ⓞ Some of the chemicals in items we use everyday would be considered hazardous waste if they were byproducts from production.
- Ⓞ Toxic chemicals can leach from products and cause health concerns. The Consumer Product Safety Commission found that children who play on playsets made of pressure-treated wood face an increased risk of lung and bladder cancer.
- Ⓞ Pregnant women, children and infants are at greater risk of harm from exposure to chemicals.

Under current policy, new chemicals in consumer products are not necessarily tested for their human health and environmental effects. Once a chemical is approved, it is difficult to limit its use. Many of the long-term effects are still unknown, but there is growing evidence that we are exposing present and future generations to harmful consequences.

One in every 200 U.S. children suffer from developmental or neurological deficits caused by exposure to known toxic substances.

- Physicians for Social Responsibility

Myth Number 2

Existing laws and regulations provide adequate protection from toxic chemicals

Government and businesses *have* made good efforts to manage toxic wastes from industrial facilities. However, consider that:

- ⊙ In Washington, more than 3,000 small businesses and millions of households are excluded from hazardous-waste regulations.
- ⊙ Most persistent, toxic chemicals end up *in* products, not as waste from production. Studies show that, currently, legal toxins in products, such as PBDE flame retardants, are accumulating in breast milk.
- ⊙ More than three-quarters of the hazardous-waste handling facilities in Washington have had some clean-up obligation because of contaminated soil or groundwater.

The belief that existing laws and long term management will protect us from the dangers of toxic chemicals can discourage prevention. It is important to explore the notion that our needs can be met without generating hazardous substances in the first place.

From 1992 to 1996, Washington discharged 1.5 million pounds of cancer-causing pollutants directly into the water – more than any other state in the nation.
- Washington State Department of Natural Resources – 2000 Report

Myth Number 3

Landfills solve the waste problem

New state-of-the-art landfills offer a vastly improved degree of environmental protection over earlier landfill designs. There are still problems:

- ⊙ Hazardous substances are present in many wastes being disposed. A landfill operator's legal liability for monitoring and paying for cleanup typically ends 30 years after a landfill is closed. Toxic substances can remain a threat for centuries.
- ⊙ The amount of waste generated in Washington state is increasing.
- ⊙ Every pound of waste going to a landfill means we must rely more and more on extracting our diminishing natural resources to meet the material needs of our growing population.

The belief that throwing things away is the best solution to waste management prevents us from addressing long-term problems of natural-resource depletion, rising consumption rates, and potential environmental and health risks from the many hazardous substances in our products. We do not need to wait for a crisis to reduce waste and eliminate hazardous substances.

In 1992, almost 5.5 million tons of solid waste were disposed of in Washington landfills. In 2001, it had grown to nearly 7.5 million tons – enough to fill Safeco Field 20 times.
- Washington State Department of Ecology



Myth Number 4

Today's recycling solves the waste problem

Recycling provides an important service, just as landfills do, yet neither are the ultimate waste solution. Current recycling programs do not successfully address long-range waste accumulation and resource depletion problems because:

- ⊙ Most products are not designed for recycling, so recovering and reprocessing materials can be difficult and expensive.
- ⊙ Resource-extracting industries, such as aluminum mines, receive government subsidies. This distorts the true cost of virgin material and places recycled material at an economic disadvantage.
- ⊙ The presence of toxic substances renders many products not useable for recycling.

To make recycling processes truly effective, economic advantages for virgin materials must be eliminated to allow for a viable recycled-materials market. Also, overall materials quality must improve through better product design and toxin elimination.

An estimated 50 to 80 percent of electronic waste collected for recycling is being exported to developing countries. "Recycling" efforts documented in China reveal open burning of plastics, and extensive dumping of acids and materials, creating extremely harmful environmental and health conditions.
- Basel Action Network

Myth Number 5

Eliminating waste and toxins will be bad for the economy

Waste is a result of failure to efficiently use resources. Consider that:

- ⊙ Eliminating waste and getting rid of toxicity are intuitively logical business practices that save resources and make economic sense. If toxins are eliminated, the need to spend money and energy complying with regulations and permits is also eliminated.
- ⊙ Demand is increasing for non-toxic and remanufactured products, creating opportunities for new markets and job niches.
- ⊙ Existing businesses can save money by recapturing material that can generate revenue.

Businesses in the Pacific Northwest are already realizing cost savings and benefits in the marketplace by reexamining their operations. Addressing inefficiencies gives us a tremendous opportunity to help our economy.

Epson Portland, Inc. (EPI) has cut hazardous waste by 37 percent since 1997 and has recycled close to 6 million pounds of material. The company diverts 99 percent of its landfill waste through recycling and reuse programs, and has saved approximately \$370,000 by reducing disposal costs and generating recycling revenues.
- City of Portland Office of Sustainable Development

