

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

With growing masses of waste becoming increasingly difficult to deal with, it is evident that producers of consumer goods must take responsibility in managing their product's environmental impacts throughout its entire life cycle. That is, not just the production stage, but also the post consumer stage. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is an environmental policy approach originally developed in Europe to aid in addressing this important concept. EPR policies aim to keep products and materials out of our waste stream. Manufacturer responsibility can be pro-active through designing products that produce less waste, use fewer resources and accommodate more recycled parts.

A major function of EPR is the transfer of the costs and physical responsibility of waste management from local governments and taxpayers to the producer. By doing so, environmental costs of treatment and disposal could then be incorporated into the cost of the product, creating a market that truly reflects the product's environmental impacts.

Examples of EPR principles are using water, energy and raw materials more efficiently; considering environmental and lifestyle impacts of the product, not just the design; considering use of pollution as well as waste avoidance, re-use and recycling during product design and manufacture; management of end-of-life products to recover wastes and re-use, disassemble, recycle and safely dispose of any residual waste.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Think about the products you buy. Support businesses that seriously consider their product life's environmental impact, and write to companies you know that could be doing a better job. Let them know how you feel.
- If you think Extended Producer Responsibility is an important approach Australia could be taking legally, contact the Environment Minister with your thoughts.
- If your company produces materials which they could be taking more responsibility for, why not look at some Australian case studies at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/waste/epr.htm

MORE INFORMATION

- www.ec.gc.ca/epr/en/epr.cfm- Environment Canada provides the fundamental principles of Extended Producer Responsibility
- www.ea.gov.au/industry/eecp/index.html- a comprehensive Environment Australia site investigating eco efficiency and cleaner production in industry
- www.nzbcscd.org.nz/- New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development