

Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) Source Reduction Meeting Summary
January 19, 2019 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
MassDEP, One Winter Street, Boston, MA

John Fischer of MassDEP presented a summary of discussion points and suggestions from the first SWAC Source Reduction Meeting, which was held on January 17, 2019. These discussion points were summarized by major issue and MassDEP identified a key discussion question(s) for each issue area. That presentation is posted along with this meeting summary. The group then discussed each of these issues further. The summary of this discussion follows below.

Extended producer responsibility (EPR)

What are the most important products or packaging for which we should establish EPR systems?

- EPR systems could be used to drive change in a number of areas, including recycled content, recyclability, recycling infrastructure and source reduction. Relative to source reduction, EPR could drive adoption of reusable packaging which would reduce the amount of packaging material used.
- Producers have already been promoting source reduction through light weighting and more efficient packaging systems.
- The current cardboard system is working, why should government get involved to further regulate this market? It may make more sense to focus EPR approaches on products and packaging that cannot be effectively recycled, like some plastics packaging.
- MassDEP response: It does make sense to better address packaging that is not readily recyclable, however cardboard is not being recycled as well as people think. MassDEP frequently observes large amounts of cardboard during waste ban inspections. Also due to the growth in e-commerce, there will be more cardboard in the residential stream, which is more challenging to recover than commercial cardboard.
- We need better cardboard enforcement and recycling, but we should also promote reusable delivery packaging as an alternative to cardboard. That would reduce waste up front.
- If you return something, retailers take back the product in the original box. Do they reuse the box or recycle it?
 - o The box would probably not be reused, but would most likely be recycled.
- Is there a way to drive tape/filler choices away from plastic and towards paper-based materials?

- EPR should focus on the items that communities pay for directly such as mattresses, tires, electronics, and latex paint.
- One approach to increase recyclable packaging would be to set up a fee structure to charge producers less if their material is recyclable and more if they use something that is not recyclable.
- Producers have not been held responsible for their waste, and it is about time municipalities and their taxpayers shift the cost to the producers.
- The underlying theme of EPR is to shift who pays. EPR will increase the cost of products as it will shift the cost of management from the tax payer to the consumer.
- One issue is that the consumer can't always make decisions about which packaging they purchase things in. Some goods do not have recyclable packaging options available. So, the burden should be on the producer to provide recyclable packaging to consumers.

PAYT and source reduction

What steps should MassDEP take to increase/improve PAYT program adoption?

- Is there any information on the impact of PAYT on recycling contamination? It seems that PAYT could cause greater recycling contamination since residents have an incentive to put less material in the trash. That could work at cross purposes with effective recycling programs.
- There is definitely a temptation to put trash in recycling because it's "free." But there is a grant for PAYT communities to police their programs. MassDEP only has anecdotal data on this.
- Education and enforcement at the curb should be implemented as part of a PAYT program to ensure that residents do not place non-recyclable items in their recycling bins.

Right to repair

What product categories provide the best repair business opportunities?

- The mission of right to repair legislation should be phrased as reducing waste, not just growing businesses and jobs.

- Right to repair legislation should be prioritized for anything with a computer in it, as it is important to have information from the manufacturer to repair these products. This could include everything from electronics to appliances to farm equipment.
- We should also promote more repair options for textiles. Although, for clothes to be worthwhile to repair over time, they have to be high enough quality to justify paying to repair. In general, repairing an item has to cost less than buying a new one.
- Minimum recycled content legislation for packaging could help drive plastic markets.
- MassDEP should support right to repair events to lead by example.
- We are a throwaway society and have to change consumer behavior for people to think about repair options and want to fix things.
- Some electronics are designed to have a shorter useful life to encourage buying new models and this makes repair challenging for these products, as they are often not designed to be repaired.
- An unintended consequence of extending the life of old products is that they often use more electricity or water and are less efficient (e.g., refrigerators).

The sharing economy

How can MassDEP or other entities best support an increased sharing economy?

- MassDEP already supports lending libraries and could do more.
- It would be really helpful for MassDEP to conduct a study to let people know what sharing and reuse opportunities are already out there and then focus on how to promote those better.

Textile reuse

Are there other strategies to increase textile reuse and recycling?

- There is a need for better public education and labeling around places that take textiles. Some places accept completely “used up” textiles (i.e. sneakers with holes). We should run a messaging campaign to educate people about reuse and recycling options for “used-up” textiles” (i.e., worn, torn, or stained clothing) to place in the system.
- The most valuable textiles are “credentialed clothing” i.e. unsorted clothing.

- Contractors who run the curbside pink bag programs pay municipalities for those textiles. This program also makes messaging easier. MassDEP should promote those.
 - o Sometimes these programs are not clear on how to get replacement bags. Do town halls have stashes? Messaging must be really clear to residents.
- Could EPR work for textiles i.e. linens and towels?

Commercial waste reduction

How can MassDEP best foster increased use of food waste tracking systems?

- The Master Plan should echo everything the EPA says about reducing food waste. Some commercial practices around source reduction of food waste could also be applied at home (i.e. change buying habits, meal planning, clarify use by and best by dates.)

C&D source reduction

How can MassDEP best leverage increased building deconstruction?

- Guidelines should encourage, rather than demand, deconstruction. Sites with space constraints in urban areas couldn't handle multiple dumpsters.
- Permit fast tracking: Could we encourage deconstruction by fast-tracking permitting for these projects or for projects using existing buildings? We should encourage people to use MassSave program when using existing buildings.
- Municipal building permits could also require recycling in addition to deconstruction. In some west coast cities, contractors pay a deposit and must show proof of recycling to get their money back.

Furniture refurbishment

What other strategies can help extend life of furniture?

- A product take-back approach or an advanced deposit fee program that goes back into a state recycling fund.
- Encourage more mattress and box spring recycling.
- Renting furniture instead of purchasing it, for example for apartment rentals.
- Are there opportunities such as leasing or refurbishing furniture?

- Need better education and awareness on how to donate furniture.
- Furniture donation is also a timing issue, since most entities can't hold onto old furniture for too long, but donation centers have limited floor space.
- MassDEP has gone through a couple iterations of reuse exchanges, but there have been minimal listings and exchanges.
- RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts is currently finalizing best management practices (BMPs) for commercial and institutional furniture reuse. This guidance lists different service providers.
- Work with technical schools to teach students refurbishment. Organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, colleges, and industrial furniture companies should work together to promote refurbishment.

Resource management contracting

How can MassDEP best foster adoption of improved contracting practices by businesses and institutions?

- Work with property management groups. Share the concept of the model and educate them on the idea of resource management contracting.
- What types of materials benefit from resource management contracting? What have been the challenges and successes?
- For more information on Resource Management Contracting, please see <https://archive.epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/smm/wastewise/web/html/rm.html>.

Other source reduction ideas

- Life cycle analysis has to drive the equation. Before we make a policy decision, we need to have scientific research that backs up our decisions.
- Some source reduction activities are actually counterintuitive i.e. replacing plastic bags with paper bags, and may have a greater upstream life cycle impact.