

Testimony to the House Committee on Energy & Environment On House Bill 2955

February 10, 2021

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council supports HB 2955 - to establish a statewide product stewardship program and a Household Hazardous Waste Stewardship Fund, to ensure that manufacturers share the responsibility for safe management and disposal their hazardous products.

As an organization that works at the nexus of human health and the environment, OEC advocates for healthful stewardship of the environments where Oregonians spend most of their time: in the home.

Household products, including electronic waste, contain hazardous substances that are a threat to human health. Storing toxic, corrosive, and flammable products in the home makes it more likely that families will suffer injuries, illnesses, and unintentional poisoning. Oregon Poison Center reports that 44% of poisonings happen to children under the age of five. When products are improperly stored or corroding, adults are also at risk from fires, explosions, and inadvertent exposures. What's more, products that contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs) can compromise indoor air quality even when stored in their sealed containers. For example, hazardous e-waste contains mercury, lead, and cadmium, which can cause damage to the brain, heart, kidneys, and reproductive systems. Today, the full cost of both proper disposal of hazardous household products, and the health and environmental costs of improper disposal, fall on all Oregonians. Instead, manufacturers and product users should be held responsible for bearing these costs.

We risk harm to our health and our environment if we don't ensure proper disposal. During the years 2008 through 2013, Oregon's DEQ surveyed 15 water basins in all parts of the state looking for a broad range of toxic chemicals. They detected 128 specific chemicals. Those chemicals included pesticides, herbicides and a range of chemicals found in everyday household products. When household hazards are released into the ground or storm drains, the health of our waterways and groundwater are compromised. Even when a waterway's chief threat may come from another source, existing impairment can make that system particularly vulnerable to household hazardous waste releases. Because Oregon's salmon and steelhead are very susceptible to chemical releases, hazardous waste stewardship is a way to protect a species that is critical to our ecosystems and to spiritual and cultural identity of Pacific Northwest tribes and Oregonians.

Stewardship is a proven and popular strategy. In 2008, a survey conducted by Portland State University for Oregon Department of Environmental Quality found that 67% of Oregonians surveyed are likely to participate in household hazardous waste collection events.

Obstacles to participation were far more likely to be lack of awareness (25% of non-participants) than lack of will (3% were unwilling or found it too inconvenient). A full 89% agreed that manufacturers should be required to share in the responsibility for safely recycling or disposing of their products.

We can reward innovation by requiring manufacturers to share responsibility for protecting our health and environment from hazardous substances. Oregon has a deep technical expertise in green chemistry and is home to leaders in cleaner and more sustainable business practices. In 2009, Oregon Environmental Council convened some of Oregon's industry, academic and public agency leaders in green chemistry to develop recommendations to strengthen green chemistry in Oregon. In a consensus statement, the leaders concluded that Oregon needs a variety of "push" and "pull" policies in order to stimulate supply and demand for greener products and processes. By holding manufacturers accountable for proper management and disposal of hazardous household products, we can spur additional innovation to create safer, less hazardous alternatives.

The Oregon Environmental Council, on behalf of our members throughout Oregon, urges support for HB 2955.

i OHSU Oregon Poison Center web site accessed February 15, 2017; <http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/outreach/oregon-poison-center/you-and-your-family/index.cfm>

ii US EPA; Volatile Organic Compounds Impact on Indoor Air Quality; web site accessed February 15, 2017; <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/volatile-organic-compounds-impact-indoor-air-quality>

iii Oregon Department of Environmental Quality; Statewide Water Quality Toxics Assessment Report; April 2015 <http://www.deq.state.or.us/lab/wqm/docs/WQToxicsAssessmentReport.pdf>

iv Oregon Department of Environmental Quality; Household Hazardous Waste Survey Results Report; Survey Conducted January, 2008 By Portland State University Survey Research Lab <http://www.deq.state.or.us/lq/pubs/docs/sw/hhw/HHWSurveyResultsCompleteReport.pdf>

v 2009; Oregon Environmental Council; Advancing Green Chemistry In Oregon; http://oeconline.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Advancing_Green_Chemistry_Report_Sept2010_web.pdf