

NATIONAL PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP FORUM

Stewardship gaining steam, speakers say

By Joe Truini

BOSTON — Those two cups of coffee you had this morning cost two trees in the Colombian rain forest.

That's the message local, state and national environmental officials wanted to get across at the 4th National Product Stewardship Forum held in Boston June 3-5.

The United States needs to reduce its consumption. The average American consumes 120 pounds of natural resources per day, said Laurie Burt, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

Recycling and waste management have benefited from the public's attention to larger environmental issues, and industry increasingly is being called upon to take responsibility for its products.

"There's no doubt that product stewardship has gained significant momentum over the last five years," she said.

But conventional thought has to change toward considering the direct impacts of the raw materials and energy used to make consumer goods, said Scott Cassel, executive director of the Product Stewardship Institute.

"That's the way we need to start thinking about things, across the whole life cycle of the product," he said.

That way of thinking is starting to take hold, Burt said.

"There is a real paradigm shift underway here," she said. "We are no longer looking at how best to manage waste, but rather how to efficiently manage materials."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency supports the shift of end-of-life product management and disposal from the public sector to the product chain, said Susan Studien, director of the EPA Region 1 Office of Environmental Stewardship.

"The EPA does support the goal of product stewardship," she said.

The agency's Beyond the Resource Conservation and Recov-



SIGNED COPY: Scott Cassel, executive director of the Product Stewardship Institute, autographs a copy of "Handbook of Household Hazardous Waste" during a reception at the Product Stewardship Forum in Boston. Cassel wrote a chapter in the book.

ery Act 2020 Report clearly articulates an EPA Materials Management Division, a federal push to treat waste as a resource rather than simply oversee and manage its disposal, Studien said.

Massachusetts became the first

state to put energy and environment under the same management umbrella last year when Gov. Deval Patrick created the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Burt said.

"I don't know why other states

haven't done it," Burt said. "It makes a lot of sense. Energy choices have environmental consequences; environmental choices have energy consequences."

The state also is trying to encourage manufacturers to make more environmentally safe products, said Massachusetts state Rep. Frank Smizik. Even common household products such as plastics, pesticides, solvents and electronics contain chemicals and compounds that can be harmful to human health, especially as they accumulate in the environment.

State Senate Bill 2481, known as the Safer Alternatives Bill, calls for replacing toxic chemicals with more benign options.

"Companies are slow to transition to these alternatives on their own," Smizik said. "In effect, we not only have to address the problem of global warming, but also the issue of global poisoning." ■

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