



Groups Make Progress Toward System for Collecting Latex, Oil-Based Paint

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Industry and environmental groups are making progress toward forming a nationally coordinated system for managing leftover paint, much of which contains hazardous compounds. But some issues still need to be resolved.

The National Paint and Coatings Association's (NPCA) board of directors recently authorized NPCA to work with interested parties, such as Product Stewardship Institute Inc. (PSI), to develop a memorandum of understanding for creating a nationally coordinated system. Under the memorandum, NPCA member companies would commit to a pilot project to work through "critical issues" and gather information that would be needed to develop the system. The board is expected to consider approving the memorandum in July.

The parties are striving to create a nationally coordinated system because the costs to local governments of collecting leftover paint have ballooned. Leftover paint is the largest volume material collected by most household hazardous waste collection programs.

Last month, the Environmental Protection Agency estimated that about 10 percent of the house paint bought in the United States each year – some 69 million gallons – is ultimately discarded. If a new system isn't developed soon enough, state and local agencies may develop different programs and regulations that could create potentially exorbitant costs for industry.

For a nationally coordinated system, the paint industry wants to institute an "eco fee" similar to what five Canadian provinces have adopted. Consumers would pay the fee, based on a voluntary agreement between manufacturers and retailers, at retail. An industry-run organization would collect the eco-fee revenue from manufacturers and distribute the money to locations collecting the paint. Transporters and recyclers also would receive eco-fee money to handle the paint.

PSI Executive Director Scott Cassel told HWSA he is "cautiously optimistic" about the stakeholders' ability to agree on a nationally coordinated system for managing latex and oil-based leftover paint.

"We have been working with the industry for four years," Cassel said.

"They've shown a commitment to developing a national system."

Still, several issues could prevent a quick solution. State and local agencies, as well as recyclers, have objected to NPCA's stance that collecting or recycling latex paint in cans that are less than one-third full or that are gathered in rural areas is not cost-effective. The pilot project, to be conducted in Minnesota, will help determine that.

Paint that is disposed of improperly can present significant environmental risks, Barry Elman, paint and coatings program manager in EPA's Sector Strategies Division, told HWSA. Paint may contain organic solvents, fungicides, and, in the case of very old paint, hazardous metals such as mercury and lead.

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