

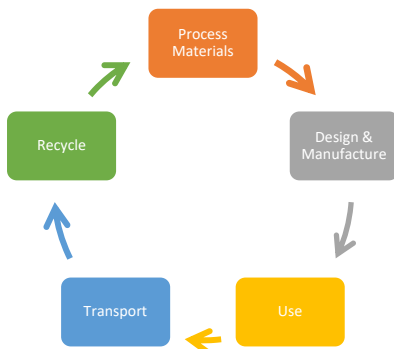
ELECTRONICS PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP IN ALASKA

OVERVIEW

The Solid Waste Alaska Taskforce (SWAT) is seeking to develop and pass an Alaska electronics product stewardship law in 2024, meeting the interests of Alaskans. Product stewardship will reduce electronics recycling and disposal management costs for Alaska communities, businesses, and institutions and help to protect Alaska's lands and subsistence resources.



SWAT
Solid Waste Alaska Taskforce



WHAT IS PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP?

Once products are no longer useful, they must be safely discarded or recycled. But historically, the price consumers pay for their products doesn't cover this. That cost is paid by local government, who in turn transfer the cost to residents or businesses directly or via taxes, making for an inefficient system. With product stewardship, recycling and disposal responsibility is partially or wholly transferred to the producers of the product. Because they are businesses, greater efficiencies are realized and the products are recycled. To create a level playing field for businesses, a stewardship program is typically legislated. The result is a win economically and environmentally.

TO KNOW

SWAT has worked with multiple stakeholders statewide since 2017 to identify an overall product stewardship framework that is viable and self-sustaining, and can work for Alaska. In Fall 2021, SWAT contracted the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI), a subject matter expert, to assist in this effort.

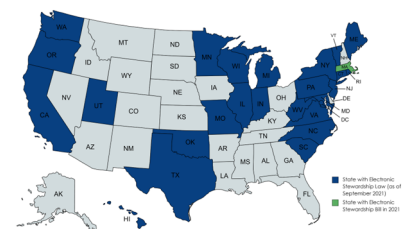


WHY ELECTRONICS?

Electronics are potentially harmful and their demand is only growing. *Electronics comprise by far the largest volume of toxic heavy metals that can cause cancer, developmental effects, and more.* Metals do not degrade and landfill containment systems can potentially fail after decades of use. In fact, half of Superfund sites are old municipal landfills. It makes far more sense to recycle electronics. The natural supply of heavy metals like lead, cadmium, and lithium is limited, and national security supply chain issues are growing. Recycling can supplement the metals extracted through Alaska and other U.S. mining projects in meeting the nation's metals demand domestically.

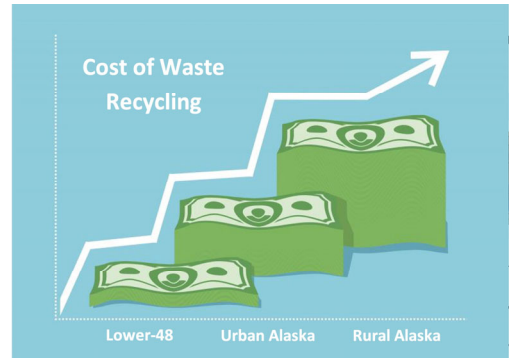
ELECTRONICS STEWARDSHIP IN THE U.S.

Emerging from a multi-stakeholder initiative sparked and convened by PSI in the early 2000's, product stewardship laws now exist in 25 diverse states, across the political spectrum. The laws vary widely, but in most cases recycling and disposal costs borne by the electronics industry are spread out across a manufacturer's entire market, both domestic and internationally. Thus, when you pay for a computer in Alaska or anywhere, a tiny fraction of that price pays for electronics disposal in most Product Stewardship states, such as New York, Texas, and Maine.



WHY HERE?

Compared to other states, our need for safe disposal is greater and our disposal is more costly. Our unique rural community landfills are not designed for electronics. Once discarded, toxics can enter the lands, waters, or air via leaching or burning practices, and much sooner than it might take if discarded at an urban landfill. Subsistence resources, upon which not just rural Alaskans depend, but many urban Alaskans as well, can be impacted, as can tourism. At the same time, because there are no recycling facilities here, electronics must be transported to the Lower 48 for final recycling, incurring a hefty freight cost for our local and regional governments at a time of tightened budgets.



The End Result? With our recycling and transportation costs high but spread out over the industry's global consumer base, Alaskans stand to accrue from product stewardship a greater cost savings per person than other places. But because our population is very small, any additional cost per product for that base would still be relatively low.

BENEFITS

A product stewardship law will result in sustainable recycling funding from the electronics industry and convenient collection opportunities for urban and rural Alaska. It will benefit us in the following ways:

- Create recycling and waste sector jobs in rural and urban communities.
- Bring revenue to local governments and our Transportation Industry.
- Prevent toxics in subsistence resources and in Alaskans that use and consume them.
- Bolster rural technical skills capacity and ensure safe handling of hazardous materials.
- Enhance and protect Alaska's pristine image, which protects the tourism industry and local economies that depend on it.
- Poise Alaska to responsibly manage waste from Arctic development.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Several entities, including the Alaska Federation of Natives and the Alaska Chapter of the Solid Waste Association of North America, have already passed resolutions in favor of a Product Stewardship Program. As of January 2024, Senate Bill 175 was introduced by Senator Tobin in the Alaska Legislature. To view the current version of the bill, go to <https://www.akleg.gov/basis/Bill/Detail/33?Root=SB%20175>, or search for 'SB175 Alaska recycling 2024'.



CONTACTS

To contact the Solid Waste Alaska Taskforce about product stewardship, please reach out to the following SWAT Executive Board members:

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