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British Columbia Trip Report

By Bill Sheehan, Executive Director, PPI
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I spent week of March 6-12, 2011, in British Columbia -- in Vancouver, the largest city, and Victoria, the provincial capital. My mission was to see first-hand how the BC approach to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is working. PPI has been promoting the BC approach since our founding in 2003 and I think it is accurate to say that we had an influence in getting California to adopt the essence of the BC results-based approach to EPR, and through California, helped set the terms of debate for the rest of the US. Although we have been promoting the BC approach, I had only caught glimpses of the programs on the ground over the years.

I came away energized. The core of the BC results-based approach to EPR is the idea that environmental product stewardship should be based on producer and user responsibility (those who design and benefit from products), and it is governments role to *regulate* and industry's role to *do*. Although it is still a work in progress, what I saw evolving is a rich, market-based system in which **the key word is diversity** -- diversity of product categories separately and carefully regulated, diversity of stewardship organizations, and diversity of consumer-tailored options for collecting products and packaging. It may be PPI's important role to research and communicate the BC approach to EPR, with all its warts, and translate it to an American audience. Ontario and Manitoba are getting most of the attention as examples of Canadian EPR programs for packaging and hazardous products. I think BC has invented something unique that is working better than the Canadian and Manitoba programs and that improves on even European programs.

During the week I had meetings with: two of the provincial regulators who originated the approach in the mid 1990s; the current BC Environment Ministry EPR team including two department heads; key contacts at two industry stewardship organizations and a consultant to one of them; a retired plastics industry executive; members of local government; the head of a depot association; several NGOs and citizen activists; and an academic (the originator of the ecological footprint concept). I stayed at Helen and George Spiegelman's house and Helen accompanied me on some of the outings.

My most interesting meeting was with Dennis Kinsey. He developed a model for taking back beverage containers and other packaging at one of the big supermarket chains. Mr. Kinsey's work has been carried forward since he left several years ago. What he saw was an opportunity for the retail industry to get customers to return packaging to their stores. He created clean, well-lit, in-store return centers called *Changes*. They service a certain demographic of customer: those who shop weekly and like to return 10 or 20 containers at a time to a clean place. The customers are incentivized by refunds on deposit containers and by receiving "points" that can be redeemed in the store for specific other packaging that is returned (based on agreements with participating brand-owners). The owner of the chain was able to see this opportunity to build relationships with his customers.

The interesting part of the story is the fact that *Changes* is just one of a rich diversity of return options available in many BC localities, options that are customer-specific and that have evolved

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organically. The major stewardship organization for non-milk beverage containers, Encorp Pacific, contracts with *Return It* depots that people generally drive to. The one Return It depot we visited was rather grubby compared to the *Changes* center we visited, and I was struck by the inefficiency of not crushing the thousands of soft drink containers full of air, which are then trucked to their next stop. Beer containers returned to the depot under a separate contract with the beer industry, by comparison, are crushed before shipping (800 to 1,000 aluminum beer cans into a brick the size of a shoe box).

Here's a description by Mr. Kinsey of the diversified system of take-back opportunities for containers that has evolved in his suburban community of Maple Ridge. He concludes: Maple Ridge is serviced by a combination of Return to Retail, Municipal Blue Box, Centralized Depot and Encorp large volume Return It Centres, **each catering to a specific consumer demographic in the area.**

- *I am a resident of Maple Ridge BC and also sit on the board of the Ridge Meadows Recycling Society <http://www.rmrecycling.org/>, so I have a very good knowledge of the area. Currently there are several systems for Residents of Maple Ridge to choose when recycling both their deposit containers and recyclables. I will offer a brief description of the options and what they provide:*
- *Two (2) **Changes Recycling Centres** - these centres are part of the Overwaitea Food Group Save On Foods stores <http://www.owfg.com/>. These centres pay full deposit for all non alcohol beverage containers and offer incentives for non deposit packaging from participating brand owners. The centres cater to medium to small volume consumer returns.*
- *Two (2) **Encorp Return It Centres** www.encorp.ca - These centres offer full deposit paid on all beverage containers both alcoholic and non alcoholic. These centres tend to cater to consumers with larger volume returns. They also cater to commercial accounts such as bars and restaurants. They also accept electronics.*
- *One **Safeway** retail store - which accepts limited returns on non alcoholic containers.*
- *One **Coopers Foods store** - part of the Overwaitea Food Group, does not have a Changes Centre attached but accepts limited returns.*
- *One **government liquor store** which accepts alcoholic beverage containers (wine and spirits and beer.*
- *Six **private liquor stores** - which accept limited returns on alcoholic containers.*
- *A **blue box curbside** program, operated by the municipality in conjunction with the Ridge Meadows Recycling Society, which services approx 80% of Maple Ridge Residents and accepts all types of recyclable materials.*
- *A **centralized Drop Off Depot**, again operated by the Ridge Meadows Recycling Society - open seven days a week and services Maple Ridge residents which don't*

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have access to blue box. It also services residents with large volumes of recycling and provides a commercial service as well.

Another striking thing about BC is how rapidly new product categories and new stewardship organizations are coming on-line. The excellent [BC Recycling Handbook](#) (aimed at consumers) is barely a year old and is already out of date, as there are four new industry stewardship organizations (12 total) that have been created since it was produced. Encorp's Neil Hastie says the *Handbook* will be updated this summer. On March 16th the 12 BC stewards released a 14-minute video explaining the BC approach: see <http://www.encorp.ca/bcstewardship/>

PPI plans to organize a workshop in British Columbia for key American contacts working on EPR. In addition to hearing directly from some of the people I met with, we'll take them to a community like Maple Ridge, and we'll go through a department store and point out what products are currently under EPR stewardship programs, what products will be coming online in the next two years, in four years, etc.

But there are warts in the BC system. A big one is governance of stewardship programs, where the neighboring province of Alberta may have some instructive experience. It will be useful to tell these stories also.

Below is info from the BC Environment Ministry's website indicating the breadth of EPR programs -- <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/recycling/ipsp.htm>

British Columbia - Industry Product Stewardship Programs

As of March 2011

Beverage Containers

- [Encorp Pacific \(Canada\)](#)
- [Brewers Distributor Limited \(BDL\)](#)

Electronics and Electrical

Computers, computer monitors, desktop printers, televisions and audio visual equipment

- [Electronics Stewardship Association of BC \(ESABC\)](#)

Portable electrical appliances

- [Canadian Electrical Stewardship Association \(CESA\)](#)

Residential florescent lamps

- [LightRecycle](#)

Thermostats

- [Switch the 'Stat](#)

Batteries and mobile phones

- [Call2Recycle](#)

Cellular/mobile Devices

- [Recycle My Cell](#)

TELUS equipment

- [TELUS Communications Company](#)

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Pharmaceuticals

- [Post-Consumer Pharmaceutical Stewardship Association](#)

Tires

- [Tire Stewardship B.C.](#)

Antifreeze, Used Lubricating Oil, Filters, and Containers

- [B.C. Used Oil Management Association](#)

Solvents and Flammable Liquids, Gasoline, and Pesticides

- [Product Care Association](#)

Paints

- [Product Care Association](#)
- [Tree-Marking-Paint Stewardship Association](#)

Detail on the Electronics, Electrical, Batteries & Light Bulb Product Category

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
E-waste Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Televisions • Computers • Computer monitors, keyboards, mice and other peripherals • Printers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-visual and Consumer equipment • Thermostats • Cell Phones • Residential Fluorescent Lamps • Batteries used in Phase 2 products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small appliances • Smoke detectors • Batteries used in Phase 3 products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large appliances • Electrical and electronic tools • Medical devices • Automatic dispensers • Lighting equipment • Toys, leisure and sports equipment • Monitoring and control instruments • IT and telecommunications equipment • Batteries used in Phase 4 products
Stewardship Plan Submitted to Ministry	Completed 2007	January 1, 2010	July 2010	October 1, 2011
Launch Recycling Program	Completed 2007	July 1, 2010	April 2011	July 1, 2012