

VIEWPOINTS: Oregon Environmental Council: it's time to pass this-Household Hazardous Waste Stewardship

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In 2017, the Oregon Poison Center received 3,478 phone calls from people accidentally exposed to spills, leaks, or other accidental exposure to household products. Today, we have the opportunity to advocate for a bill that would protect against these incidents—and protect our environment—by ensuring the proper disposal of hazardous household waste in Oregon.

House bill 2772, introduced last month, would establish a statewide stewardship program for household products that are flammable, corrosive or toxic—such as roach spray, oven cleaner, paint stripper and more. It would create a fund to ensure that the program is supported statewide. OEC strongly supports this bill, and we are joined in our support by Oregon Recyclers, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, Metro, the Product Stewardship Institute, and the City of Hillsboro.

Today, all Oregonians pay for programs to manage hazardous household products as part of our utility bills, whether we buy these products or not. HB 2772 holds manufacturers, rather than taxpayers, responsible for the negative externalities of household hazardous products—that is, the harm that they can do to our health and environment if not carefully handled. The bill ensures that these hazards can be safely managed and disposed of in every community across Oregon.

We can avoid poisoning and injury from hazardous products simply by ensuring that they aren't stored around pets and children, or allowed to rust and degrade in storage. And by keeping them out of the trash, we can protect solid waste workers. Solid waste work is one of the most dangerous jobs around, with 27.1 deaths per 100,000 workers, in part due to dangers from flammable, corrosive and toxic materials. HB2772 enlists manufacturers in designing a program with state agencies to ensure safe and responsible collection, handling, and disposing of hazardous materials that works for both business and consumers.

This would not be Oregon's first program enlisting manufacturers in programs to manage hazardous waste. Our programs to handle leftover paint and unwanted electronics has proven very effective. And while our current household hazardous waste events have been popular and effective, lack of funding makes them inaccessible or infrequent in much of the state. Oregon must step up and create a robust product stewardship program that will help residents become more knowledgeable about how to properly dispose of products such as caustic cleaners, flammable sprays, pesticides and herbicides.

For two years in a row, a House committee has recommended passing this bill. But in both 2017 and 2018, the bill has stalled before coming to a vote. Will 2019 be the year? Rep. Susan McLain says the plan is now fine-tuned to give businesses some

flexibility and to work for Oregon's communities. Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer says that, for someone who has devoted her career to protect public health and healthy communities, she can see that the bill is "ripe for passing." Now is your chance to weigh in: Tell your legislator not to let this good idea gather dust. Let's put the program to work for clean air and water, healthy homes and healthy communities.