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PaintCare Makes a Huge Difference in Recycling Paint

ACA-Product Stewardship Institute partnership has diverted more than 60 million gallons of paint from landfills.



Source: PaintCare

David Savastano, Editor01.13.23

Every time a contractor or DIY painter opens up a can of paint, it is an opportunity to create a fresh, new look to a home or a project. Rarely, though, does the painter have the exact amount of paint that is needed. There typically is extra paint left over.

According to the [Product Stewardship Institute \(PSI\)](#), a policy advocate and consulting nonprofit, approximately 10% of all household latex and oil-based paint goes unused in the US.

"That's about 80 million gallons each year," PSI writes on its website. "When dumped in the trash or down the drain, unused paint can contaminate our environment with volatile organic compounds, fungicides, and (in the case of very old paint) hazardous metals such as mercury, lead, cadmium, and hexavalent chromium."

In some cases, the extra paint can come in handy for touchups. However, most cans of paint stack up in a cabinet or get thrown away. That is wasteful and not exactly ideal for the environment.

Scott Cassel, CEO and founder of PSI, saw this as an opportunity to reuse or recycle leftover paint. Previously, when Cassel was director of waste policy and planning for Massachusetts in the late 1990s, he worked with Benjamin Moore to recycle its paint back into virgin paint at its Milford, MA plant.

"At PSI, we did research on leftover paint and found out that 10% of all paint that is purchased is left over," Cassel observed. "It costs over half a billion dollars a year cost to take care of it properly, through reuse, recycling or safe disposal. In fact, 70% of leftover paint collected is reused or recycled."

The History of PaintCare In 2002, Cassel reached out to the American Coatings Association (ACA) to see if they would be willing to help solve the problem with leftover paint. "We offered to work together on a national solution, and the industry was forward looking and decided to give it a shot," said Cassel. "ACA was innovative and got ahead of the curve."

With that, the origins of [PaintCare](#) were formed.

"From 2003 to 2007, we worked with the paint industry, state and local governments, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, recycled paint manufacturers, painting contractors and retailers to create a model state reuse and recycling program, which is now called PaintCare," Cassel said. "We had some of the big players at the table – Sherwin-Williams, Benjamin Moore, PPG and Valspar among them. Recycled paint manufacturers sort the good stuff into various colors and sheens and produce high quality recycled paint.

"We came to a formal agreement that placed the management burden with the paint industry, and state and local governments were thrilled as it takes tremendous cost and management effort to manage leftover paint," said Cassel. "PaintCare is a producer responsibility organization which runs the program. The US EPA signed the agreement, as did all of the other parties. PaintCare contracts with companies to collect the paint from participating retailers and municipal government, and those companies subcontract with recycled paint companies. They also handle the education."

Brett Rodgers, director of communications for PaintCare, said that PaintCare was formed as a result of PSI's interest in what happens to leftover paint.

"PSI proposed to the paint industry, through the American Coatings Association (ACA), to consider adopting an extended producer responsibility (EPR) program to manage leftover paint, a common waste product across the nation," Rodgers reported.

"Ultimately, the association moved ahead with the program, which is a state-by-state approach, by supporting a first-of-its-kind paint stewardship law in Oregon for a pilot program," Rodgers noted. "Later this was converted to a permanent program and additional states followed suit. Programs are now operating in the District of Columbia and 10 other states. Our newest program launched in New York in May 2022."

PaintCare Today Paint and coatings manufacturers oversee the non-profit program, and PaintCare is a wholly owned subsidiary division of the American Coatings Association (ACA).

In 2009, Oregon became the first state to implement PaintCare. Today it has been launched in 10 states – California, Colorado, Connecticut, Minnesota, Maine, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington – and the District of Columbia.

"Paint stewardship legislation has been introduced in half a dozen other states," Cassel noted. "Showing the economic, social and environmental benefits are key to promoting the program. There have been more than \$300 million in collection and processing costs avoided. Some of the politicians were concerned the fee would be considered a tax, but it isn't a tax. It is a consumer fee that is fully dedicated to paint reuse and recycling."

PaintCare is an unqualified success: today, the American Coatings Association reports that more than 60 million gallons of paint has been recovered in the US alone. That's impressive, as not every state is yet part of the program, although bills are introduced in new states each year.

Working with leading paint and coatings manufacturers and their distributors as well as independent retailers, PaintCare provides a convenient option for households and businesses to get rid of leftover paint by providing drop-off sites throughout a state within accessible distance to nearly all of the population.

"This enables them to clear out storage spaces of old paint without costly waste hauling services and keep those materials out of landfills, protect the environment and water tables, and convert a waste product into a usable, beneficial resource such as new recycled content paint products, other products such as cement mixtures, fuel blends in the case of oil-based paint," Rodgers noted.

How Does PaintCare Work? PaintCare partners with drop-off sites, most of which are paint retailers like paint and hardware stores, and PaintCare also partners with government-run waste facilities to support paint collection. There are more than 2,000 drop-off sites across all of PaintCare's programs, mostly at paint and hardware retail stores. In addition, PaintCare reports that it has managed paint from more than 6,500 collection events.

"We are grateful to our partners — paint and hardware stores, household hazardous waste facilities, and other organizations, working together with paint manufacturers to take responsibility for leftover paint and lower the cost of paint management," said PaintCare president Marjaneh Zarrehparvar.

"Households and businesses are able to drop off smaller quantities of leftover paint at these sites at no charge," Rodgers observed. "For those with large volumes of 100 gallons or more, we'll provide a free door-to-door pickup, a benefit that particularly helps paint contractors who purchase and store a lot."

"We set up waste haulers to collect the paint from those sites and they are in turn responsible for managing the paint according to the waste hierarchy – i.e. promoting reuse and recycling above other uses," Rodgers added. "The program is funded by a small fee placed on new paint purchases in the state where the program is being operated."

The Future of PaintCare The ACA is responsible for advocating for new state laws and working with those states on legislation. Rodgers said that PaintCare is a tribute to the paint and coatings industry as well as paint users' mindset regarding the environment.

"It shows that the paint industry has been an active and enthusiastic leader in taking responsibility for the 'downstream' life of its products, and paint consumers appreciate the growing sustainable options to free themselves from the burden of leftover paint," Rodgers noted.

So far, having recovered more than 60 million gallons of paint is impressive, but there is so much left to go.

"Sixty million gallons is an exciting achievement in a little over 10 years into operating this still-new program," Rodgers said. "Our volume rates usually increase by the year as we add additional state programs, such as New York, which became our second largest when it launched in May 2022 - 100 million gallons, here we come!"

To learn more about PaintCare, please visit www.paintcare.org. To learn more about PSI, please visit www.productstewardship.us.

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