
AROW STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF AB 299- July 2009 Regulating the sale of mercury-containing products

The Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW) supports this legislation to regulate the sale of mercury-containing products including fever thermometers, manometers, thermostats, instruments and measuring devices, switches and relays, and household items. This legislation is an important start in addressing the environmental and public health concerns associated with products that contain mercury, particularly with respect to mercury in schools. It makes no sense to allow sale of items containing a hazardous material (mercury) for which there are alternatives, where proper disposal is costly, and where environmental risk is high.

As the state association for solid waste and recycling professionals from both business and government sectors, our members must handle the disposal or recycling of these materials in the residential waste stream. Therefore we are very concerned about collection and proper disposal of mercury-containing products that were sold in the past. While budgets and grants have been severely cut, environmental and resident concerns for proper disposal of the above items have not diminished.

The Council on Recycling studied the issue of mercury contamination in solid waste and developed an Action Plan in 2006. They identified two major issues: 1) to reduce the release of mercury from products to the environment, due to their contamination of food (especially fish) and the subsequent harm to human health, and 2) to reduce or prevent the potential interaction of children with mercury-containing products.

Because mercury is contained in many products, they recommended focusing on those products that either contain the most mercury or are the easiest to impact with special attention to minimizing the disposal of mercury-containing products in solid waste and wastewater treatment facilities.

Based on a mercury flow model that was presented by the Community Mercury Reduction Coordinator at the DNR, the Council learned that 3,007 kilograms of mercury were estimated to have been released to the environment in 2000 in Wisconsin from the six largest product groups, an amount that exceeded the discharge of mercury to the air from all the coal-burning plants in the state. Among the largest contributions of mercury to the environment were: thermostats, thermometers, fluorescent lamps, and auto switches.

Because of the above issues, we recommend a change in the proposed legislation or future legislation to add the following:

- Ban disposal of mercury-containing items in Wisconsin landfills, incinerators, or via wastewater.
- Require take back programs by manufacturers and distributors of thermometers, thermostats, fluorescent lamps and automotive HID switches.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.