

Stewardship Rules Strengthened to Make Recycling Work

By David Goldstein, Ventura County Public Works Agency, IWMD

Last week, Governor Jerry Brown signed legislation potentially representing a path forward for recycling. It is a “product stewardship” law, one of a series of mandates in recent years giving parties in the private sector responsibility for recycling the waste of their own industry.

Similar to programs for mattresses and paint, Assembly Bill 1158 involves the carpet industry. In response to the mandates of a previous carpet recycling law, carpet manufacturers, distributors, and retailers had already banded together and attempted to improve recycling through their Carpet America Recycling Initiative (CARE).

Since 2014, CARE’s frustration with challenges to increasing carpet recycling has been reflected by their requests to the State to increase the consumer surcharge, a fee paid by purchasers of carpet in California. In other words, the carpet industry asked for higher state fees on carpet customers to fund industry-led recycling programs, even though doing so increased the cost of industry’s own product.

However, while the surcharge rose from five cents per square yard to 25 cents per yard between 2014 and 2017, eventually raising over \$10 million per year, the recycling rate stayed stagnant at about 10%, according to CARE annual reports to the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle).

The National Stewardship Action Council sponsored a bill to strengthen the carpet recycling program, and with support from California Product Stewardship Council, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Californians Against Waste, public agencies and carpet companies Interface and Tandus-Centiva, the bill passed last week. The new law sets a goal of 24% recycling by 2020, specifies how money will be spent, allows the carpet industry to operate for a year under old plans if their new plans are not approved, and establishes an advisory committee to monitor the program. Also significantly, funds will be directed to the training of carpet installers on methods of removing and storing carpet to improve the quality of materials delivered to recyclers.

In Ventura County, if you want to recycle the pads from your carpets, all you have to do is make sure your material is mixed with nothing more than other construction debris and delivered to one of the three local sorting centers -- Del Norte in Oxnard, Gold Coast in Ventura, or the Simi Valley Landfill’s Recycling Center. If those sorting centers identify the load as worthy of sorting, or if you have paid them to sort construction debris, the polyurethane foam of carpet pad is recovered and sent to factories using it for products ranging from insulation to plush toy stuffing (after sanitization).

Whole carpet recycling is slightly more difficult. Because carpet is so much more expensive to handle and to ship than it is worth at a recycler, the carpet industry’s CARE program subsidizes only a single recycler in our region. That recycler, accepting carpet free of charge from the public (not businesses) as long as it is not mixed with other materials, is Oxnard’s Del Norte Regional Recycling and Transfer Center.

Ventura County is also lucky to have a direct connection to a nearby factory consuming our used carpets. Carpets hauled from the city of Oxnard’s Del Norte sorting center go to Los Angeles Fibers, which turns them into material for plastics manufacturers. Carpet recycling is far harder elsewhere in the state; most carpet must make the journey all the way to Georgia to be recycled.

The Ventura County Recycling Market Development Zone offers incentives to manufacturers to make recycled products in Ventura County, and, like other business recruitment programs in California, may benefit from new funds expected to be available to attract new businesses using recycled carpet. As stated by California Product Stewardship Council Executive Director Heidi Sanborn in a press release on the subject, “We are looking forward to carpet mills finally designing a robust closed-loop program to benefit the California economy and the environment.”

For more information:

<http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/carpet/program.htm>

<https://carpetrecovery.org/>

http://www.no-burn.org/wp-content/uploads/SWEPT-UNDER-THE-CARPET_high-res-DECEMBER-2016.pdf