



Telephone Directories

Product stewardship profile

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Telephone directories remain a source of concern to solid waste managers despite existing statutory requirements to promote recycling of directories in Minnesota. Given the expanding options to access information, including the Internet, calls for applying product stewardship approaches for telephone directories are increasing.

Existing state regulations

Telephone directories were banned from disposal in municipal solid waste (MSW) in Minnesota in 1992 (Minn. Stat. § 115A.951).

Under the state law, publishers of telephone directories are subject to the following:

1. Provide for the collection and delivery to a recycler of waste telephone directories.
2. Inform recipients of directories of the collection system.
3. Submit a report to the agency by August 1 of each year that specifies the percentage of distributed directories collected as waste directories by distribution area and the locations where the waste directories were delivered for recycling and that verifies that the directories have been recycled.

However, the reporting remains incomplete, with only 24 companies filing reports with the MPCA in 2006. This is down from 38 companies filing reports in 2001.

Manufacturer profile

The national Yellow Pages Association represents about 125 directory publishers, comprising both phone companies as well as independent publishers.

Generation and management

Generation. The MPCA estimates that 13,000 tons of phone books were distributed in Minnesota in 2006; nearly 13 pounds per household (based on 2005 population estimates).

Recycling. Telephone directories are generally collected through local government recycling programs, primarily curbside.

The U.S. EPA estimates a national recycling rate of 18 percent for telephone directories.

Minnesota's recycling rate for 2006 was estimated at just 11 percent, down from 35 percent in 2003.

For 2006, directory publishers reported that 111 tons of phone directories were recycled. Through the SCORE report, Minnesota counties reported 1,462 tons of phone directories were recycled in 2006.

Waste. Based on 2006 estimates for recycling, 11,538 tons of phone books were discarded as municipal solid waste.

A 2007 waste composition study at the waste-to energy-facility in Hennepin County found that telephone books constituted 3.8 percent of the waste delivered to the facility.

Cost. Despite the statute enacted in 1992, telephone directories remain a problem for waste managers. A recent national study by the Product Stewardship Institute estimated that it costs \$50-75/tons to recycle, and \$75-100 per ton to manage telephone directories as garbage.

Eureka Recycling (Minneapolis) reports spending about \$32,500 annually to recycle 650 tons of directories from the east Metro area, including St. Paul.

A product stewardship approach

Product stewardship means that all parties involved in designing, manufacturing, selling and using a product take responsibility for environmental impacts at every stage of that product's life.

In 2007, several states considered legislation to promote product stewardship for telephone directories. North Carolina, New Mexico, and New York introduced legislation to provide residents a method of opting out from the receipt of telephone directories.

Both North Carolina and New Mexico put the burden of publishing the opt-out on the telephone directory publisher.

- The North Carolina legislation required directory publishers to provide residents with the option to stop delivery of directories by signing up on a "Do Not Receive Registry." AT&T proposed to stop publishing its white pages directories in the cities of Charlotte and Raleigh, and making them available on CD-ROM or on the Internet; this was not instituted.
- The New Mexico bill prohibited a for-profit business from distributing a local telephone directory to a resident who has notified the business that they no longer wish to receive the directory.
- The New York bill differs from the two above, placing more responsibility on government. This bill authorized local government to establish a registry for residents that do not want to receive telephone directories from other directory publishers that the residents do not use for telephone service.

In 2008, Hawaii has become the first state to propose opt-in legislation, where telephone book publishers would be required to obtain confirmation from recipients prior to delivery of the directory. This bill is intended to reduce waste and promote product

stewardship. The state Department of Health would implement the bill, which would become effective in 2009.

Environmental impact

Implementation of an opt-in system for phone books could have considerable environmental savings in Minnesota.

Participation in the state's "do not call" registry for telemarketing is just over 50%, about 1 million households.

Based on the 2006 estimates for total generation and recycling of phone books, if half of Minnesota's households opted out of receiving printed phone books, that would reduce waste by about 6500 tons.

That amount of waste prevention translates to conserving 101,583 million Btu, and preventing 14,000 "metric tons of carbon-dioxide equivalent" (MTCO₂E), a measure of global-warming potential.

Learn more about the MPCA's Product Stewardship Program: www.pca.state.mn.us/stewardship.