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## Legislature tackles new laws to reduce toxic materials

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

For the Washington Legislature this session, taking care of business included asking business to take care of the environment.

Gov. Chris Gregoire signed three major green consumer laws passed by the Legislature, each of them requiring the private sector to assume most of the costs and responsibilities. This trend reflects new realities for the state government, which has dwindling coffers yet faces increased pressure from citizens and local governments to reduce toxics in products and expand recycling opportunities.

Today we'll take a look at green consumer bills in the 2010 legislative session, including one that didn't make the cut.

**Q:** The proper disposal of products containing toxic materials has been a hot topic. What did the Legislature do about that?

**A:** Senate Bill 5543 requires lighting manufacturers to pay for recycling programs for light bulbs that contain mercury. This means residents statewide will have access to convenient recycling programs at no charge for both CFLs (compact fluorescent lamps) and fluorescent tubes, beginning in January 2013.

Washington is the second state in the nation to pass this type of "producer pays" law for fluorescent light bulbs. The law is similar in concept to the electronics-recycling law that went into effect in Washington last year.

Most CFLs and fluorescent tubes contain only small amounts of mercury, but because of its toxicity, all mercury should be kept out of landfills. Currently, just a few retailers provide free recycling of CFLs. Visit [www.takeitbacknetwork.org](http://www.takeitbacknetwork.org) for listings of existing recycling locations in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties.

**Q:** Speaking of toxics, what about the law banning a chemical in baby bottles?

**A:** As of July, 2011, SB 6248 bans the chemical additive bisphenol A (BPA) from plastic baby bottles and other food and drink containers intended for children 3 and younger. The law also bans BPA from sports bottles beginning in July 2012.

Studies have linked BPA to various health problems. The chemical industry says BPA is safe, however, and also points out that most of the baby bottles and water bottles currently sold no longer contain BPA.

**Q:** Isn't the use of BPA being curtailed everywhere?

**A:** It's certainly being examined more closely. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency just announced it will increase its scrutiny of BPA. But the chemical industry still fights hard against bans, and Oregon's legislature recently decided against banning BPA in baby bottles. Washington is only the fifth state to restrict BPA in baby bottles and the second to ban it in sports bottles.

BPA is still used in the lining of most food cans. State legislatures have not yet addressed this issue because it appears no viable substitutes currently exist.

**Q:** What's the third new green consumer-protection law?

**A:** Under the pollution-prevention measure, SB 6557, Washington has become the first state in the nation to restrict the amount of

copper in brake pads in cars and trucks. The law limits the use of copper in brake pads because it flakes off when the brakes are used, falling onto roadways where it washes into rivers and streams. This ban will be phased in over the next 15 years.

**Q:** Where can I learn more about these laws?

**A:** For full details on bills, whether they passed or not, search by number or key words at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo>.

**Q:** Were there any related bills that came close but didn't make it?

**A:** Bill 5279, which would have required drug manufacturers to fund collection programs for unwanted medications, fell short for the third year. Although Group Health pharmacies, some Bartell Drugs stores and some law-enforcement offices currently accept unwanted drugs (see [www.medicinereturn.com](http://www.medicinereturn.com) for locations), the bill would have made it much more convenient for people to properly dispose of old medicines.

Nevertheless, the success of three green consumer bills this session made a splash, highlighting environmental protection in Washington as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of Earth Day this spring.

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