

Draft Summary of the NEPSI Infrastructure Subgroup Discussions
Boston, MA
November 8-9, 2001

The NEPSI Infrastructure Subgroup met for several hours during the afternoon of November 8th and the morning of November 9th, as part of the NEPSI meetings in Boston. The task of this subgroup is to discuss and provide recommendations to the Stakeholder Group about the manner in which the infrastructure should be developed to provide for increased collection, reuse, and recycling of used electronic products. The subgroup's mission is to design an effective and efficient infrastructure, taking into account the consensus attributes from the June NEPSI meeting in San Francisco. The subgroup facilitator is Wayne Rifer of WEPSI, with David Stitzhal of NWPSC acting as co-facilitator.

This document briefly summarizes the major topics covered during the subgroup's discussions, and highlights any agreements that were reached.

Near-Term Goal

The subgroup participants agreed that their near-term goal is to prepare a report for NEPSI's January meeting, outlining the different options for developing an infrastructure for increased collection, reuse, and recycling of used electronics.

Process

The participants agreed that they will hold biweekly conference calls, with the first three calls occurring on November 20, December 4, and December 18. Each call will start at 3:00 EST and last 1½ hours. Both NEPSI stakeholders and observers are allowed to participate in the calls. If subgroup members identify other people who have specific expertise that would be helpful to the subgroup, the participants can invite these experts to sit in, but should notify the facilitators in advance. In general, the subgroup agreed that the number of participants should be kept to a manageable level.

The subgroup also agreed that a list serv should be set up for continuing dialogue via e-mail and for sharing documents.

Focuses of the Subgroup's Work

The subgroup discussed the "Preliminary Scope and Discussion Questions" document that had been prepared for them. The participants reviewed the list of discussion questions presented to them and decided to divide the list into three new categories, which parallel the three main challenges facing the subgroup:

- **Existing Systems.** The first challenge facing the subgroup is to answer questions about the effectiveness of existing models for collection, reuse, and recycling. The subgroup participants agreed that they will all search for data sources that will help answer these questions. Possible data sources include the NERC report.

- **“Vision” System.** The subgroup’s second challenge will be to create a vision of how an ideal collection, reuse, and recycling system would work. The subgroup agreed that answering questions about the ideal system should be the main focus of their work. They also agreed that they should develop criteria for evaluating any proposed system, using the “Attributes” list as a starting point.
- **Implementation.** Finally, the subgroup will address questions about how to implement the proposed system and how to measure progress and performance.

Research Needs

The subgroup discussed steps they could take if they identified specific areas where research was needed. The participants agreed that the first and best option would be to have subgroup members or their associates do the research, if they have the skills required. If there are other research needs that can’t be met in this manner, the subgroup can approach Gary Davis, Catherine Wilt, or EPA representatives to ask for help. In general, though, the subgroup anticipated that most research done by the group will be a pulling together of existing data, rather than original research.

Hierarchy

A question was raised about how remanufacturing will fit into a NEPSI electronics stewardship system. The subgroup participants agreed that, in developing a “vision” system, they would need to define a hierarchy to apply in terms of reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling. Wayne Rifer offered to send around a one-page summary he had written, defining a hierarchy for e-waste management. The subgroup agreed that identifying and reaching consensus on a hierarchy should be one of their first goals.

Market Capacity

The subgroup participants discussed how to evaluate the capacity of existing markets for recycled materials, and how capacities might change under a national system. Some participants suggested that the subgroup would need to answer questions about current capacity if they hoped to set realistic objectives for the future. Others pointed out the difficulties in assessing capacity, especially since many recyclers currently export materials overseas. The subgroup discussed whether part of their charge is to address market development needs and the overseas movement of recycled materials and e-waste under a national electronics stewardship system. One participant stated that NEPSI stakeholders should make sure that markets exist (or will exist) for materials recycled under a NEPSI system—or should at least be able to reassure decision-makers that such problems have been considered. Another participant said that the subgroup would eventually have to address capacity issues, since doing so is part of developing a successful infrastructure. Wayne Rifer mentioned a software tool being developed by the Polymer Alliance Zone for modeling costs and capacities for recycled materials. He suggested that the subgroup may want to consider using the model and offered to look into it.

Costs of “Vision” System

The subgroup discussed whether they need to consider costs while developing recommendations for an ideal collection, reuse, and recycling system. One participant said that this subgroup should estimate cost, and the Finance Subgroup should address how to foot the cost. The subgroup talked without reaching agreement about what level of detail they should go into when considering cost. The general consensus seemed to be that the subgroup’s thinking should be “reality-based” rather than “dream-based.” However, the participants also agreed that they should “shoot high” when envisioning a new system and aim for something quite different from what’s going on now.

Certification for Demanufacturers

One subgroup participant pointed out that there would need to be some monitoring or auditing of the recycling and recovery process to ensure that demanufacturing companies “do the right thing.” The subgroup agreed that the NEPSI infrastructure system would need some built-in assurances, such as a certification system or standards system for demanufacturers. Another participant suggested that this may be a “cross-over” topic that the regulatory subgroup might want to get involved in.

“Parking Lot” of Issues

The subgroup agreed to create a “parking lot” of secondary issues that they will address as time permits. This includes certification for demanufacturers, software licensing, issues associated with export of recycled materials and e-waste to overseas markets, and identifying research gaps.

Exchange of Ideas about Models

The subgroup agreed that it made sense to write up something about models for collection, reuse and recycling as a starting point for discussion. Wayne Rifer offered to send out a message via the subgroup’s list serv to stimulate an e-mail exchange about how models should be structured. Based on the ideas that emerge from the exchange, the subgroup could then develop a draft write-up. The subgroup agreed that this was a good plan.