Carpet Industry Attempt to Undermine California Recycling Scheme Revealed

New Report Identifies Toxic Carpet Burning Increase is Consequence to Weak Industry-led Recycling Plan

Full report: www.no-burn.org/carpets/

(SACRAMENTO) On Tuesday, December 20th, CalRecycle will decide whether or not to adopt a carpet industry plan that would continue to deliver an industry-implemented carpet recycling program that has been out of compliance for the last three years in California.

“California became the first government in the world to require that the carpet industry take responsibility for managing its waste,” explains Monica Wilson from the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), which opposes carpet incineration waste disposal. “The law mandates that carpet waste be diverted from landfills, prioritizing reuse and recycling over incineration. Incineration can release harmful toxic chemicals into our environment and impact human health.”

“CalRecycle authorized the industry group, Carpet America Recovery Effort (CARE), lead by the biggest carpet producers, Shaw and Mohawk, to take charge when it authorized their stewardship plan,” Wilson adds, “The industry set its own goal for recycling, but their efforts to meet their goal were weak and instead of increasing recycling rates, they have more than doubled incineration.”

Miriam Gordon, with GAIA, says “Doubling the quantity of carpet burned is a terrible outcome from this program. Incineration releases chemicals like dioxin, one of the most potent carcinogens. Even the most modern pollution control devices cannot prevent the escape of many hazardous emissions such as ultra-fine particles of PCBs, dioxin, furans and nanoparticles, which are not regulated by the US EPA.”

“Swept Under the Carpet: Exposing the Greenwash of the U.S. carpet industry,” details the carpet industry influence with information compiled by the GAIA and Changing Markets. Gordon adds, “Industry leaders failed to do what was necessary to make recycling viable, wasting the $10 million collected annually in consumer fees.”

Some carpet waste goes to incinerators and cement kilns in California. Gordon says “It’s typical that these incinerators are sited in low income communities and communities of color, who typically bear the burden of pollution impacts.”
The report highlights the efforts of leaders in the carpet industry to ensure the status quo when it comes to who pays the costs of disposal and recycling. According to Heidi Sanborn, Director of the California Product Stewardship Council, “Making California consumers pay a fee that the carpet industry controls while failing to deliver a convenient recycling program is not what legislators wanted when they passed the law.” Sanborn, who lobbied for a carpet bill that would make the industry pay for the recycling program, explained, “The carpet industry should be made to internalize the costs of a recycling program and build facilities in California for the benefit of Californians. Allowing the industry to play with consumer fee money gives them no financial incentive to really improve effective and safe carpet disposal. This has led to the weak program we have today.”

The investigation conducted by report co-author, Changing Markets, reveals that the big manufacturers who sit on the board of CARE work in close alliance with the industry trade association, the Carpet and Rug Institute, actively lobbying against any other state passing a similar recycling mandate. To date, the industry has managed to kill legislation in Connecticut, Minnesota, Illinois and Washington State.

In September 2016, CalRecycle found CARE out of compliance with the California law. For the third year in a row it has failed to show meaningful progress on recycled output, has not provided adequate collection, has conducted poor education efforts in the state, and hasn’t focused on marketplace incentives to counter the increased use of non-recyclable materials.

Now, CARE has proposed a similar plan for the next five years (2017-2021) that promises to do more of the same.

On December 20th, CalRecycle will determine whether or not to approve the plan. Staff has recommended to the Director, Scott Smithline, that the plan be rejected and give CARE another 120 days to come up with a new one. Gordon says, “We applaud the staff recommendation to reject this do-nothing plan. CalRecycle should do something to dismantle the control of the biggest carpet manufacturers - Shaw and Mohawk - over this program - they appear to not be interested in any true change.”

Cities with green purchasing policies, are challenged to find carpet that meets their commitment to be green. “San Francisco is one of many local governments committed to protecting human health and our environment through our purchasing practices. It can be difficult to find products that have high recycled content, are recyclable and non-toxic - carpet is no exception,” said Julie Bryant, City Government Zero Waste Coordinator at the San Francisco Department of Environment. “Local governments would like to see a greater commitment from carpet manufacturers to producing sustainable and healthier products that meet our needs.”
Press contacts:

CalRecycle: Mark Oldfield, Public Affairs Director, (916) 319-9942, mark.oldfield@calrecycle.ca.gov
CA Product Stewardship Council: Heidi Sanborn, Director - Heidi@CalPSC.org, (916) 402-3911
GAIA: Miriam Gordon (415) 902-5196 report co-author, miriamgordon09@gmail.com