

The policy and practice of extended producer responsibility: an assessment of key themes and policy choices for advancing sustainable materials management

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1. Extended producer responsibility (EPR) continues to expand globally as a primary policy strategy to reduce the environmental impacts of products.
2. As a policy approach that extends up and down the product chain, EPR creates financial and informational incentives to redesign products, develop product service approaches and promote sustainable supply chains, outcomes that the conventional government service model is not well positioned to achieve.
3. Characterized as a market-based policy approach, EPR seeks to internalize the environmental externalities associated with the life cycle of products and promote a more economically efficient model than can be achieved without the engagement of product producers.
4. The lack of EPR policy consistency across jurisdictions is visible and may inhibit the achievement of EPR policy objectives such as design for environment and circular economy business models.
5. EPR policy demonstrates a core suite of general policy choices including whether to pursue individual producer or collective producer responsibility, how the roles and responsibilities among parties along the product chain are allocated and how the performance goals are structured among others.
6. Extended producer responsibility demonstrates policy diffusion as evidenced by the influence of the EPR policy approach in Canada on the policy design and implementation in the United States.
7. Despite the expansion of EPR requirements globally, the end of life management for products is often not a core activity within the corporate social responsibility (CSR) profile of firms.
8. The governance of EPR, and specifically the allocation of the responsibilities between producers and government, varies among jurisdictions and product categories thus complicating accountability and achievement of broader product system changes.
9. Further research is necessary to deepen the understanding as to how, and under what circumstances, EPR can be strengthened to spur eco-design and promote sustainable supply chain management worldwide.
10. The U.S. EPA estimates that approximately 42 percent of U.S. GHG emissions are associated with the life cycle of products, a finding that lends further support for expanded policy action to reduce the environmental impacts of products.
11. Any discussion of recycling inevitably arrives at the question, “paper or plastic?”

