Manitoba industry plan suggests consumers pay more in recycling fees

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Manitobans could pay more for new flat screens, stereos and other electronics under a proposed fee-based e-waste plan that's raising the eyebrows of environmentalists, who fear consumer backlash.

A draft of the long-awaited industry-led stewardship plan for Manitoba's electronic waste was made public late last week,

The plan proposes a new "environmental handling fee" for electronics purchases in Manitoba.

That cash would be used to cover the costs of recycling and handling e-waste, currently handled by the provincial government, but soon to be taken over by industry.

Some companies might include the fee in their ticket prices, but in general the fee will show up separately on receipts.

One local environmental group is wary of the plan, pointing to the recent backlash in Ontario that led the province to scrap a host of newly announced fees on household products last month.

Eco-fees are "seen in the consumer's mind as something that government is imposing on them, that makes their costs higher," said Josh Brandon, Green Living co-ordinator for Resource Conservation Manitoba.

The organization would rather see costs of e-waste handling internalized in the price of new electronics, with different industry groups paying their share of recycling costs. Brandon said that approach would provide an incentive for companies to reduce costs.

Electronics Product Stewardship Canada president Shelagh Kerr said it's too early to say how much the fees would amount to in Manitoba. That organization, along with the Retail Council of Canada and the Canadian Appliance Manufacturers Association, are responsible for the draft plan.

Opting for a separate fee, rather than building recycling costs into the sticker price, would "harmonize with other programs across Canada," Kerr said, and keep product prices consistent.

"Having the fee separate and visible for the service provided of collecting products back and recycling them, is important," she said. "Otherwise, it would be very

difficult to have a national pricing policy."

In July, Ontario scrapped a controversial new set of eco-fees on thousands of household products after less than a month following widespread opposition. However, fees on electronics and some other products are still in place there.

(Winnipeg Free Press)

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