

King County 2014 Mattress Recycling Summit – Meeting Notes

ShoWare Center, Kent, WA

Sept. 17, 2014

Summary

King County LinkUp brought together over forty participants from mattress and recycling industries, along with representatives of local, county, and state government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders for a discussion of challenges and opportunities for mattress recycling in the Puget Sound region.

The 2014 Mattress Recycling Summit built on an earlier summit, held in 2011, that helped to connect stakeholders and foster collaboration for increased mattress recycling in the region.

The 2011 summit was a great success, with more than 50 stakeholders from all parts of the mattress supply chain coming together to share information about mattress recycling and discuss the challenges of mattress collection, storage, transportation and recycling. Since then, King County LinkUp has continued to work towards making mattress recycling more convenient and available, and address the challenges to mattress recycling in the region.

The goal of the 2014 Mattress Recycling Summit was to share insights and developments in mattress recycling from the past three years, and to hear from participants about what are the critical issues in mattress recycling, now and for the future.

Through the summit and other efforts, LinkUp aims to:

- Increase the collection infrastructure and the convenience of mattress recycling for King County residents and businesses.
- Increase awareness of mattress recycling options and opportunities among mattress retailers, local municipalities, the solid waste management industry, and the general public.

King County LinkUp would like to thank all the participants of the 2014 Mattress Recycling Summit. Presentations from this summit, the 2011 summit, and other information about industry developments and resources can be found on the King County [LinkUp Mattress website](#).

Summit Introduction – Alex Erzen, King County LinkUp Mattress Project Manager

Alex Erzen of King County LinkUp provided an overview of the current state of mattress recycling in the region and LinkUp's efforts, highlighting the growth in collection and processing —as of 2014, there are 4 processors and 6 collection locations between King, Snohomish, and Pierce Counties (from Tacoma to Arlington) —but noting that there is not yet full and convenient geographic coverage. Alex also presented findings from a consumer survey and mattress management approaches in other jurisdictions.

State of Mattress Recycling Nationally – Mike O'Donnell, Mattress Recycling Council Program Director

Mike O'Donnell of the Mattress Recycling Council (MRC) shared updates on and details of mattress stewardship program planning. The MRC was created by the International Sleep Products Association (ISPA), the trade association for the mattress industry, and is a non-profit organization tasked with implementing mattress recycling (or stewardship / EPR (extended producer responsibility) laws in states with supporting legislation, which to-date are Connecticut, California, and Rhode Island.

Summary of Q&A with Mike O'Donnell

Q: Is the stewardship program fee only for customers recycling mattresses?

A: No. When the [MRC] Program is implemented, the fee will be applied to every mattress sold in the states with mattress recycling laws (CA, CT, RI). The fee applies to residential and commercial mattresses and box springs. It does not matter whether the purchaser is a hotel purchasing many mattresses or an individual mattress, and all sales are subject to the fee. Mattresses that are used and discarded in these states are eligible for recycling through the program.

Q: Do you have any programs/interaction with the tribes? As a sovereign nation, perhaps taxes/fees don't apply? We [Coville Tribe] are very rural, have casinos with lots of mattresses.

A: We have not dealt with this issue yet. The program does have to serve all customers in a state, including rural areas.

Q: What is the status of EPR legislation in Washington?

A: Currently there is no active legislation. The Mattress Recycling Council is focused on getting the first three programs up and running in CT, RI, and CA.

Q: How did the three states involved get selected?

A: These states passed legislation. Connecticut, the first state to pass EPR legislation for mattresses, has a long-standing history passing recycling legislation.

Q: How do recyclers get selected for participating in the program?

A: There is an RFP process.

Q: Regarding contamination, issues with bedbugs – how do you handle that?

A: Mike of MRC: Recyclers in the states we are working in are not interested in accepting mattresses with bedbugs. Most have implemented a process for dealing with bed bugs.

A: Suzanne Breen of A Plus: We have not had any problems with bedbugs; when materials come in very soiled, we dispose of the outer components and recycle inner components, or don't accept (only if extremely soiled).

A: Jeremy Simler of Spring Back: When we receive mattresses with bedbugs, we bag and fumigate.

A: Fabio Scaldaferrri of MattressRecycling.ca: With bedbugs, we remove the top layer and send it to an incinerator, then recycle everything else. It's important to have employees keep work clothes separate from street clothes.

Panel: Successes and Challenges in Recycling

In a panel discussion, representatives from recycling, hauling, and retail businesses discussed current issues.

Panelists:

A Plus Removal and Recycling – Suzanne Breen is the manager at A Plus Removal and Recycling in Auburn. This 28-year old company started recycling mattresses in 2012 after participating in LinkUp's 2011 Mattress Recycling Summit; they also recycle other items including appliances, car parts, lawnmowers, and electronics. A Plus serves King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties with both pickup and drop-off services. A Plus has been a Take it Back Network member since 2009, and was the first mattress recycling Take it Back Network member.

Spring Back Mattress Recycling NW – Jeremy Simler is the mattress recycling manager at Spring Back NW in Tacoma. Spring Back NW is a mattress recycler that creates employment opportunities for disenfranchised individuals, is a division of the nonprofit NW Furniture Bank (an active participant in LinkUp's 2011 Mattress Recycling Summit), and is affiliated with other franchise branches of Spring Back (Salt Lake City, Denver, Charlotte and Nashville). Spring Back NW offers pick-up services to King and Pierce counties, as well as drop-off. Spring Back NW has been recycling mattresses since July 2013, and has been providing recycling service to the City of Tacoma landfill since March 2014.

Soaring Heart Natural Bed – Mike Schaefer is the owner at Soaring Heart Natural Bed. Soaring Heart is a Seattle-based manufacturer of handcrafted mattresses and bedding that ships mattresses and has a retail store in Seattle's Queen Anne neighborhood. Their mattresses are made with natural, organic and locally-sourced materials. Soaring Heart has been recycling customers' old mattresses since 2011, after participating in LinkUp's 2011 Mattress Recycling Summit.

[Note: During the discussion other recyclers in attendance in the audience also responded and are included below.]

Overview of Mattress Recycling

Q: What is your system for mattress recycling – how does it work for your customers, and how does it work on the back end?

Spring Back: We receive mattresses from retailers, collectors, and direct from consumers (pick-up and drop-off).

A Plus: We get most mattresses from recycling collection events we coordinate with municipalities.

Soaring Heart: 30% of our customers purchasing a new mattress pay for us to have their old mattress recycled.

Q: What equipment do you use in your recycling facility?

Spring Back: People, balers, forklifts – it's pretty manual, people with a box knife.

A Plus: The recycling process is very manual for mattresses. We recycle other materials in addition to mattresses, so springs get combined with other [non-mattress] metals, not baled.

Q: Do you accept mattresses direct from consumers? Do you charge a fee?

Spring Back: Yes, we charge \$10/piece. [Note: each mattress and box spring is considered a piece, so a king mattress with double box spring would be \$30 total.]

A Plus: Yes, at city recycling collection events we charge \$10/piece. We charge \$15/piece at our warehouse.

Q: For Soaring Heart – you say 30% of customers have you take back their old mattress, is that because only 30% have an old mattress to get rid of?

Soaring Heart: Yes. We feel that we've maxed out our recycling potential with our customers, so recycling growth will come with more retailers [offering recycling].

Q: You mention that the mattresses you collect are reused or recycled. How and when are they reused?

Spring Back: Through the NW Furniture Bank, we *do reuse* 10-15% of mattresses collected: mostly these come from retailers (e.g. new mattresses returned under a return policy), *not* from individual consumers. We do NOT

resell these; NW Furniture Bank provides donated furniture to clients referred by partner agencies. All mattresses reused are disinfected.

Q: What do you do with box springs? Are they recyclable?

Spring Back: We have a shearer for disassembling.

A Plus: We take them apart by hand – separating metal from wood; they are more labor-intensive than mattresses themselves.

Q: How many mattresses do you process? Are you looking for more volume?

A Plus: We do a few hundred a week. Yes, we are looking for more volume.

Spring Back: We do a few thousand a month. We are young, still figuring out capacity, getting input to match throughput. Sure, we are looking for more volume.

Challenges

Q: What are the major challenges facing your company or the mattress recycling industry in general right now? What is the one thing you would like to see change in order for you to be more successful with mattress recycling?

Soaring Heart: When we were here three years ago, the biggest challenge was finding a convenient central location for storing collected mattresses until we had a sufficient volume to justify pick-up by the recycler. I left the last summit feeling charged up and thought “how hard can this be?” Well, it’s hard. I spent six months trying to figure out a place for placing a collection container [on-site or nearby], and between the City permit issues, neighbors complaining, etc. we figured out that placing a container would not be possible. We finally went to a neighboring apartment building to rent two parking spaces in their garage to pile mattresses. Go to other retailers and see, where would they place a collection container? It’s a real and continuing challenge for retailers to find space for this.

Spring Back: Transportation costs are also a big issue. Having retailers bear those costs makes recycling less feasible.

Q: [from the audience:] It seems like there could be real trouble if there was a bedbug outbreak: what would we do?

Fabio of MattressRecycling.ca: Just put bags on mattresses collected. With the exception of mattress toppers, material components from mattresses with bedbugs can still be recycled.

Soaring Heart: Well, it might be fine for a recycler to pick up mattresses with bed bugs, but a retailer can’t do it because they are using the same truck that they are delivering new mattresses with.

[Note the very useful Connecticut Coalition Against Bed Bugs’ guide to “[Best Practices for Bed Bug Management](#)” (PDF) (via the [CT Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection’s mattress recycling website](#)).]

Q: I have heard that an increasing number of mattresses have pocket coils [coils individually encased in fabric] and that these are more difficult or costly to recycle: is this an issue for you? What are you doing with them?

Spring Back: Older mattresses [5+ years] generally are less recyclable/valuable – the foam is worn out or soiled. These are just some of the things we deal with. It is noteworthy that springs/coils are not very dense metal, so they do not fetch as high a price from metal recyclers as other metals [or compacted metal].

Fabio of MattressRecycling.ca: We were baling/recycling pocket coils with car metals, but our buyer felt the loads were too contaminated [by fabric], so pocket coils are currently getting landfilled; but that will stop soon because they are causing problems at the landfill too.

A Plus: We include pocket coils with other metals [without removing the fabric]. We get paid a lower metal rate because of the cloth on them, but they are still getting recycled.

Q: What about design improvements to increase the recyclability of mattresses? Is the mattress industry thinking about design for recycling?

Soaring Heart: Yes – our mattresses [as both a retailer and manufacturer] are even refurbishable. But, overall, the mattress industry has worked on accelerating obsolescence (e.g., doing away with double-sided mattress), so that's just the reality. We're doing our bit, but I wouldn't expect it to be a model the rest of the industry will follow. So recyclability needs to be part of the discussion.

Mike of MRC: Recyclers I am working with have said that pocket coils are not a problem; acceptability may be a local issue, smelter/market dependent. Mattresses are already 90-98% recyclable.

Q: For recyclers, has anyone recycled prison mattresses? Are there any issues with these?

Fabio of MattressRecycling.ca: Not prison mattresses but we have recycled hospital mattresses – we have encountered syringes in hospital mattresses, we need a sharps container to deal with what we find in them.

Robert Jaco of St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County (DR3): We keep them separate, process them carefully. There are hazards, but the recycling rate is not different.

Opportunities, Solutions, Next Steps

Q: Councilmember Bill Peloza of Auburn asked: What is your opinion of having mattresses and box springs banned from disposal?

A Plus: Yes, I support a ban. But there would need to be an exemption for contaminated mattresses that are un-recyclable.

Jeff Garfield of Bedrooms and More: You need to have convenient collection locations to make a viable situation for consumers. Otherwise, you'll end up with illegal dumping.

Debra Taevs of Exceed Enterprises [in Portland]: Exceed has taken a different approach and is approaching local government and others to begin recycling mattresses. Exceed has proposed to pilot mattress collection and recycling with Portland transfer stations.

Q: At the 2011 Summit, one of the mattress recyclers said that the value of the mattress components was not enough to cover the cost of disassembly: is that still the case? Is that true for others?

Spare Our Landfills: We use recycling fees and revenue from recycled products, and it is enough.

Mike Zachman of Arlington Recycle Warehouse [regarding the ban question above and costs]: It seems like we would need to have a fee on the front end [at the point of sale], because we can't support recycling at the scale needed for ban conditions with back-end [recycling] fees only. We are a non-profit and need grant funds or some other way to supplement our revenue to operate.

Q: Are there opportunities to work with the ISPA? What is the opportunity for an EPR program in WA? How does King County get to a solution for mattress recycling?

Mike of MRC: The MRC is focused on getting these first three states up and running (none of them have been implemented yet) and is not advocating for new legislation at this time. PaintCare (the paint stewardship organization created by the American Coatings Association) is an example of getting program consistency from state to state, and being able to show results from the first programs implemented before adding more [states].

Soaring Heart: I talked to the executive director of ISPA the last time I saw him and he said that in principle, from a national perspective their number one goal is to stop each state from adopting its own creative solution for this. So his goal is to talk to each state that is considering something and get them to stop and wait until the results are in from CT, RI, and CA. I personally don't think that's a way to get something done to address a problem that gets bigger and bigger every day, and I don't want us to wait that long to do the right thing. If we [in the industry] want to see something happen in this state, we need to get together, and, as retailers, we need to ask, are we okay with a fee going on every mattress we sell? Or are we okay with a disposal ban? I think, sure why not? But do we have enough clout, when there are four retailers in the room? Probably not.

Since the last summit [in 2011], we can now say that we *are* successfully recycling mattresses. So, it's working for us. But we have a lot more to do. We need more retailers than just the four here (the same who were here in 2011) to see that it's possible, it's working, and to start [more retailers] participating.

Summary of Small Group Discussion session

Q: What was discussed – any solutions or issues to note from small group discussions?

How to help retailers?

- This table discussed how to unify small businesses, to collaborate to create drop sites and bring costs down among small retailers [consolidation, storage, and transportation costs].

Where do we see the industry in 3-5 years?

- Transportation is a key cost driver.
- If people can dispose of mattresses at a city/county [public] transfer station for less than the cost of recycling, they will do that. At the very least, transfer stations must increase the disposal fee for mattresses.

What can local governments do?

- Government must take action.

Is Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) considering raising disposal fees?

- SPU: raising disposal fees is a process – we need to go through the City Council for approval of any kind of change in fee structure for collection at the Seattle transfer stations. But we do have bulky item pick-up services. Perhaps we can redirect those requests to a recycler who will pick up.

Follow up question to SPU: *would City Council's decision to approve a change in Seattle's transfer station fees be affected by businesses and other organizations commenting that they agree with the fee change?*

- SPU: absolutely.

Other comments:

- In any case, recycling would benefit from having a separate fee for mattresses at transfer stations.
- Perhaps retailers could establish an incentive for consumers to recycle, e.g., a \$30 deposit, customer gets \$15 back if recycled?
- We need to foster/facilitate corporate buy-in for local franchise commitment to participate in recycling.