

The Electronic Wave is Only Getting Bigger

So you finally got that new flat screen TV with your tax return, but where will that old TV go? As we upgrade our TVs from analog to digital, determine four-year-old computers to be obsolete, replace our old cell phones with newer, cooler versions, and continue to throw out the old in favor of the newest electronic gadget, we're creating a modern-day electronic waste problem, called e-waste, that's piling up with momentum and ferocity. Landfills and incinerators were not designed to handle today's electronic craze, and our system for recycling these materials hasn't kept up with the pace of new product development, either.

Electronic products contain a host of toxic substances such as lead, mercury, cadmium, and flame retardants that pose a serious threat to human health and the environment when improperly handled. The EPA admits that all landfills will eventually leak, which means the hazardous substances in computers and other electronic equipment are already leaching into the groundwater and soil.

To address this growing environmental concern and to give consumers an option to dispose of their outdated goods responsibly, the Eco-Cycle/City of Boulder Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials (CHaRM) at 5030 "old" Pearl St. in Boulder is open to the public and safely recycles electronic products like computers, TVs, and cell phones (and much, much more). Looking for a local e-scrap option? No problem, we're bringing the CHaRM to you! Eco-Cycle will be hosting the 7th Annual Hard-to-Recycle Round-Up on April 14th from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Eco-Cycle/Broomfield Recycling Center, and will collect the same items taken at the CHaRM, including e-scrap, #2 and #4 plastic bags, books and manuals, #6 white block foam and more! Most of the electronic items are accepted for a fee because these sophisticated machines are complicated and dangerous to recycle. Visit www.ecocycle.org/charm for fees and a full list of materials accepted.

Eco-Cycle insures that the e-scrap collected through the CHaRM or at our CHaRM events is dismantled domestically, rather than exporting these toxic substances to developing countries. This is essential to the environmental integrity of our program as many other proclaimed e-scrap "recyclers" send their materials overseas to Asia or developing nations where in most instances, electronics are dismantled using unsafe methods, exposing workers and the environment to great harm. In some cases, computers are openly burned in pits by unprotected women and children or discarded in waterways and along roadsides.

To formalize our dedication to the most socially and environmentally responsible e-scrap recycling, Eco-Cycle signed the "Electronic Recyclers Pledge of True Stewardship," developed by the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, Basel Action Network and Computer Take Back Campaign. Those signing the Pledge commit to the highest standards of environmental and economic sustainability in our industry, and we live out this commitment through our operations and partnerships.

Eco-Cycle and other Pledge signers commit to:

*No exporting of hazardous commodities (i.e. cathode ray tubes, circuit boards) to developing countries

*No use of prison labor

*Environmental and worker safety management systems

*Regular testing and audits to ensure compliance

*Supporting efforts to encourage producers to make their products less toxic

Learn more about the Pledge at

http://www.computertakeback.com/the_solutions/recycler_s_pledge.cfm

Ultimately we'd like to see producer responsibility for e-waste, meaning manufacturers are held legally and financially responsible for the end-of-life management of their electronic products. Manufacturers would offer free recycling of their products or pay for local programs like ours. Dell now offers free recycling for all its products and around the world countries are mandating manufacturers to do the same. We're working on a similar program for the U.S., but for now there's the CHaRM collection to help you recycle responsibly and help keep the electronic wave at bay.

Genevieve George is Eco-Cycle's Broomfield Outreach Coordinator. To learn more about recycling or the Eco-Cycle/Broomfield Recycling Center, call (303)404-2839 or e-mail genevieve@ecocycle.org