

#2

The Electronics Junkpile: Environmental Hazard, Unfunded Mandate

Toxic TVs, poison PCs

The electronics revolution is about to hit the landfill, and it isn't going to be pretty. Tens of millions of computers alone become obsolete every year and less than 10% are recycled. One report estimated that the current number of obsolete computers would cover the city of Los Angeles with a mountain 16 miles high.

Discarded electronic equipment is one of the fastest growing waste streams in the industrialized world due to the growing sales and rapid obsolescence of these products. Electronic equipment is also one of the largest known sources of heavy metals, like lead and mercury, and organic pollutants in the waste stream. Without effective phase-outs of hazardous chemicals and the development of an effective collection, reuse and recycling system, our environment and public health are severely threatened.

It's time to reboot the system

Currently, the burden and expense of collecting, managing and disposing of discarded electronics are borne by taxpayer-funded government programs, primarily at the local level. Brand-owners and manufacturers have ignored their responsibility for the management of products at the end of their useful lives, while public policy has failed to promote producer responsibility, clean design, and local taxpayer relief for the consequences of choices they did not make and over which they had little control.

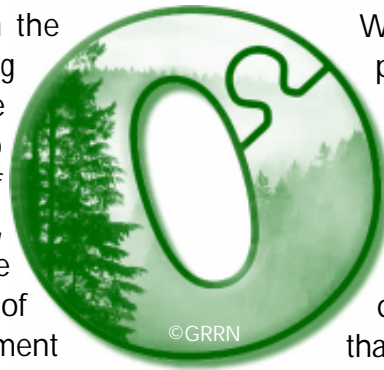
Brand-owners and manufacturers of personal computers and consumer electronics equipment must take financial and/or physical responsibility for their products through the entire product life-cycle, including in particular product take-back and end-of-life management. The principle of extended producer responsibility ("EPR") shifts financial responsibility to brand owners and consumers and off of local governments.

When brand-owners are responsible for their products "cradle to cradle," they have a powerful incentive to eliminate waste at the source and reduce costs by designing products that are non-toxic, durable and easy to disassemble and recycle.

Companies that innovate more quickly will be more competitive than those that delay. Companies in countries throughout Europe and Asia are already implementing EPR take-back programs – including companies that operate here in the U.S. This international double-standard is second-class treatment for American consumers and workers.

Communities lead the way

Communities are staring at the next environmental and economic crisis of the Information Age. But local governments are leading the call for producer responsibility in the personal computer and consumer electronics industries. From California to Massachusetts, local governments are passing resolutions calling for statewide producer take-back requirements to protect the environment and local taxpayers.



Take Action

The GrassRoots Recycling Network is co-leading a [national campaign](#) to promote producer responsibility in the personal computer and consumer electronics industries. Local government resolutions are instrumental to the early success of this effort and we encourage every municipality to take action on this problem.

Model Electronics Take Back Resolution

WHEREAS

- The placement of materials in waste disposal facilities, such as landfills and incinerators, causes damage to human health, wastes natural resources, and wrongly transfers liabilities to future generations; and
- Electronic discards are an increasing problem, with millions of computers becoming obsolete every year and 3.2 million tons of electronic waste ending up in United States landfills in 1997 ; and
- Electronics contain lead, cadmium, mercury, hexavalent chromium, polyvinyl chloride, brominated flame retardants and other materials that can pose hazards to human health and the environment when handled improperly; and,
- Only 14% of personal computers that became obsolete in 1998 were recycled or refurbished(3) ; and,
- [the city/county of _____] has taken responsibility for the safe management of discarded electronics and implemented a number of programs at taxpayer expense to reduce illegal dumping and promote the proper disposition of these products; and,}
- The States of California and Massachusetts recently acted to ban discarded cathode ray tubes, such as those found in televisions and computer monitors, from municipal landfills, increasing concerns regarding proper disposal, cost and liability; and,
- Extended Producer Responsibility (“EPR”) principles will foster the development of sustainable design and recovery of electronic equipment by shifting the defaulted burden of disposal responsibility from government, ratepayers and taxpayers back to the manufacturers, distributors and consumers of such products, where it properly belongs, in part by internalizing lifecycle costs in the price of such products; now,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT

- (Name of jurisdiction) hereby calls on (names of state legislators) to introduce or support legislation mandating that computer and electronics manufacturers create comprehensive programs for extended product responsibility, including computer take back programs and education and labeling for consumers about the hazards of disposing of obsolete computers and other electronic waste; and
- Be it further resolved that if there is no effective state authority for extended product responsibility by [one year hence], (name of jurisdiction) will prepare a local ordinance requiring each seller of a computer or other electronic equipment to make arrangements for taking back and properly managing the product when obsolete.

Advocating Producer Take-Back: *GrassRoots Recycling Network*

Producer take-back is a key element of [GRRN's Zero Waste agenda](#). Effective, environmentally sound collection of products at the end of their useful life is the first step in promoting clean design, increasing recycled content, limiting virgin resource extraction, and properly allocating responsibility. GRRN believes that producer responsibility and Zero Waste will happen because local communities and their citizens can make it happen.

For more information, visit www.grrn.org/localgov/