

## House Republican Press Release

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### **E-Waste: A Growing Problem of Disposal**



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What do you do with your old computers and televisions? If you're like me, you store them in the deepest corner of the attic and hope the electronics fairy will quickly and silently take them away, leaving a cash refund under your pillow. Not going to happen!

The disposal of outdated, unwanted business and personal electronics is a huge – and escalating - problem. E-waste is the fastest growing component of our refuse system, 8 percent annually, at a time when our overall municipal waste volume is declining.

In 2007, Connecticut was one of four states to pass e-waste legislation. With input from all the stakeholders - manufacturers, retailers, environmental groups and legislators – the goal was to craft a bill not only for Connecticut but one that would also serve as a model for other New England states. Problems arise when recycling legislation, such as Connecticut's and Maine's bottle bills, is not mandated by neighboring states.

A member of the Environment Committee who initiated the bill commented, "We all agree that environmentally we need to do something. The choice is over who pays. We must make recycling cost-effective and convenient if we want people to participate." As with motherhood and apple pie, no one is against recycling, but the devil is in the details.

There are basically two possible strategies for success. Either the retailer collects a recycling fee from the purchaser at the time of sale (akin to a bottle deposit) or the manufacturer imposes a fee at the point of wholesale. California adopted the first plan by requiring retailers to collect a deposit (Advance Recovery Fee) on sales of all computers and televisions. These deposits are forwarded to a state agency that redistributes the funds to recyclers that dispose of the equipment. The first negative of this plan is that a huge state department, bureaucracy if you will, must be established to organize the recycling fees, redistribution and recycling centers. Second, this option lets the manufacturers off the hook.

Since small mom-and-pop shops are already complaining about lack of space in storing returnable bottles, what happens when all available space is filled with old computers and TVs?

For forty years, manufacturers of computers and televisions have had a free ride by not assuming responsibility for properly disposing of the lead, mercury and cadmium in their products. These are toxic materials and should not be thrown into our landfills.

At one time, obsolete computers, at least by current standards, were either rebuilt into newer models or donated to schools that didn't have the resources to buy new. As computer prices dropped and the need for increased memory grew, old computers no longer had a lingering shelf life. Given the huge number of old cathode-ray TVs that are being discarded in favor of new flat-screen models, there are not sufficient landfills to hold all this obsolete equipment.

It's interesting to note that the European Union is much further ahead of the United States with regard to e-waste recycling. The EU has set up ROHS (restriction of hazardous substances) and has created environmental standards by which all manufacturers doing business in the EU must comply. Eventually, these standards will be global, as it's cheaper and easier to make one product that meets the universal standard.

Connecticut's e-waste recycling will work as follows: Any manufacturer of computers or televisions doing business in Connecticut must register with the state beginning January 1, 2008, and pay a one-time registration fee. By January 1, 2009, all covered electronic devices (CEDs) can be sold in Connecticut only if the manufacturer takes part in a recycling program. The state's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is currently writing the regulations for these programs, which stipulate that the receiving stations be conveniently accessible and open at reasonable hours in every town. An individual, for no fee, drops off his discarded CED at a receiving station. (111 Greenwich, most likely this will continue to be located at the Holly Hill Transfer Station.) From the point of drop-off, moving forward to the recycling center, the costs will be borne by the manufacturers.

True, any mandate imposed on the manufacturers eventually makes its way to the consumer, but we who use these products should pay something for their proper disposal. It is also axiomatic that once manufacturers are required to recycle electronics on their dime, the incentive will be there to build cleaner and more recyclable electronics. When money is at stake, there will be ingenuity.

Connecticut's e-waste program is new for all of us. It will have twists and turns to straighten out when we begin implementation in two years. A major concern of which the DEP is aware is the destruction of information stored on hard drives: how to ensure to the user's satisfaction that information cannot change hands before the device is recycled. Eventually hard drives should be easily and safely disabled by the consumer before recycling, another issue to be resolved as we march through the electronics era.