



# Northwest Product Stewardship Council

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES, RELATED TO THE COLLECTION OF USED ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS**

Recycling electronic waste (e-waste) is a hot issue for residents, businesses and local governments alike. Currently there is no national program, or foreseeable national legislation, addressing the management of electronic products at end of life. However, four states, including Washington, have passed specific electronics recycling legislation.

The legislation in three of the four states; Washington, Maine and Maryland, puts some level of responsibility on electronic manufacturers to help pay for -- and in Washington's case, to help **fund and implement** -- the program. These programs represent a new waste management strategy called "product stewardship" or "producer responsibility".

Until these state programs are implemented, and in those areas where there is no state legislation, citizens are pressuring their local governments for options to recycle their growing volumes of old electronics. Though a long-term, national solution is the highest priority, this document provides considerations for local programs and actions that can be implemented in the interim, before state bills or national laws come in to effect.

1. Participate in product stewardship dialogues about electronics recycling at the state and national level. The national **Product Stewardship Institute** (<http://www.productstewardship.us/>) continues to address this issue on behalf of local and state governments. They sponsor occasional conference calls to continue coordination and dialogue on the topic of electronics stewardship and product stewardship in general. Have your local government participate in such discussions.
2. Work with your state agencies to develop state legislation that advocates a "shared responsibility" approach to managing electronic products at the end of life. The states of Maine, Washington, Maryland and California have legislation in place that shows the various ways that electronics can be managed at the state level. The **Northeast Recycling Council (NERC)** (<http://www.nerc.org/>) has developed key elements of model electronics recycling legislation for consideration by state governments. (<http://www.nerc.org/adobe/ElectronicRecyclingLegislation/KeyElementsofRegionalDraft4-06FINAL.pdf>)
3. Help establish an ongoing private-sector collection system rather than instituting a government-run program. Partner with manufacturers, retailers, recyclers, non-profits, and other organizations to collect and recycle electronic products from residents. For an example of an active network, visit the **Take it Back Network** web site at <http://www.takeitbacknetwork.org>.

4. Contact electronics manufacturers and let them know that you would like them to share the responsibility for their products and to help cover the costs of collection, transport and recycling. Many manufacturers, such as **Dell and HP** are now offering electronics recycling programs and may be willing to work with your community.

5. If you are considering running an electronics recycling collection event, don't contract with a vendor(s) that will get rid of your product on the cheap. Some products are regulated and some recycling operations are more environmentally responsible than others. Conduct an environmental review of your vendor(s) and exercise your right to prescribe that your citizens' products be handled responsibly. The **Basel Action Network** has developed the Recyclers Pledge of True Stewardship that requires recyclers to handle their materials in an environmentally sound manner and restricts exports to developed nations (<http://www.ban.org/pledge1.html>). Ask your vendor if they have signed the Pledge. The Environmental Protection Agency has developed the **Plug-In to eCycling Guidelines for Materials Management** that can be referenced in your contracts with vendors (<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/consERVE/plugin/guide.htm>).

6. Don't be afraid to charge a fee to cover the costs of collection and recycling. Pilot projects have shown the public is willing to pay. The public needs to know that recycling e-waste is an expensive proposition. However, as a long-term solution an end-of-life fee could discourage recycling, so make it clear that eventually the costs for proper management should be incorporated into the product's purchase price.

7. Carefully consider who needs assistance with e-waste recycling services (such as residents, schools and small businesses.) Commercial generators are likely to have reasonable options available to them and can also work with their equipment suppliers to require vendor take-back. Commercial and institutional generators should be expected to follow local, state and federal laws, but may be unaware of them. It is often the small business or resident that has only one or two computers or a TV to recycle that can't find a recycling service.

8. Collect data on the quantities, types and brands of equipment collected at your events or through your private collection networks. The **National Center for Electronics Recycling (NCER)** (<http://www.electronicrecycling.org/NCER/>) is coordinating an effort to develop a publicly available, searchable, national database of electronics recycling activity. The **Centralized Data Repository (CDR)** is an open, collaborative public/private data sharing project which is addressing the need for up-to-date information on the collection and recycling of electronic waste. Data collection forms that can be used at your events are available at: <http://www.electronicrecycling.org/NCER/CallForData.aspx>. This database will help you evaluate your options for establishing electronics collection programs, learn from colleagues across the country, and help you measure your program's success.

9. Do something unique to test a new model or pilot project. For example:

- Perform on-site triage with emphasis on product reuse.
- Separate in-coming material by product-type and by brand and then allocate costs to the respective manufacturers. Florida has been building a database of recovered equipment sorted by brand.

10. Don't make irreversible commitments to "government-will-pay-for-it-all" collection programs. Having local governments pay for collection, transportation and recycling is not a viable long-term solution for many communities, even if it may be an interim solution for some:

- Representatives of many local governments feel that starting down that path sets a bad precedent.
- Be cautious in the message given to your public because once expectations are built, they will be hard to reverse. There is a flood of product in storage that will eventually enter the waste stream.
- Consumers of electronics, not taxpayers and ratepayers, should cover these costs.

### **WHAT CAN MUNICIPALITIES DO TO ENCOURAGE PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP?**

While regional, national and international efforts are underway to establish an end-of-life collection system that also encourages manufacturers to design for the environment, there is more that can be done by local governments to encourage product stewardship.

Product Stewardship asks all parties who make, sell, buy and handle electronic equipment to take responsibility for minimizing the environmental impacts of those products at all stages of the product's life cycle. It's a change from the current practice of expecting local governments to manage unwanted products, whereby costs fall on solid waste ratepayers and taxpayers, instead of on the producers and consumers who make, choose and use the products.

Product Stewardship calls on producers to:

- Design products that are more easily disassembled and recycled;
- Use less toxic and more recycled/recyclable materials;
- Design products that last longer, with parts that can be replaced or upgraded;
- Take back used products for rebuilding or recycling;
- Develop an environmentally-sound collection and recycling infrastructure;
- Incorporate the costs for these practices into the product price, to be paid by electronics consumers directly (rather than ratepayers.)

There are a number of ways that a local jurisdiction can assist in establishing product stewardship for electronics.

1. Educate yourself, your staff and your policy-makers, and begin to think through product stewardship approaches. There are a lot of opportunities to learn about product stewardship, which is a new approach in this country but well established in others. To start, read the Product Stewardship Principles developed by many state and local governments who are members of the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI). PSI exists to assist state and local agencies in establishing cooperative agreements with industry and environmental groups to reduce the health and environmental impacts from consumer product manufacture, use, storage and disposal. Your jurisdiction may want to join the PSI, contact <http://www.productstewardship.us/>. A number of cities and counties have introduced Product Stewardship Resolutions about electronics including the City of San Francisco. Visit the Product Policy Institute's web site for more information [http://www.productpolicy.org/assets/resources/SF\\_Resolution\\_PASSED\\_-\\_EPR\\_universal\\_waste.pdf](http://www.productpolicy.org/assets/resources/SF_Resolution_PASSED_-_EPR_universal_waste.pdf).

2. Do the right thing from the start. Work with your purchasing department to purchase electronic equipment that is "Environmentally Preferable." That means using your buying power to require products that are less toxic, energy efficient, more durable, upgradeable, repairable, and recyclable. See the Northwest Product Stewardship Council's Green Purchasing web page which lists the rating systems and purchasing guides for electronics at <http://www.productstewardship.net/productsElectronicsGreenPurchasing.html> .

In July, 2006, the EPA released EPEAT, the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool <http://www.epeat.net/> . EPEAT is a procurement tool to help institutional purchasers in the public and private sectors evaluate, compare and select desktop computers, notebooks and monitors based on their environmental attributes. EPEAT evaluates electronic products according to three tiers of environmental performance – Bronze, Silver and Gold. There are already more than 130 products listed on the EPEAT web site that have met the criteria for the bronze level of environmental performance.

3. Manage your jurisdiction's electronic waste appropriately from the beginning. That means developing future vendor contracts whereby the vendor is responsible for taking back used equipment after it is no longer wanted. Currently, many jurisdictions continue to auction off nonworking monitors with desirable equipment as a way to dispose of them. We recommend that this practice be discontinued and monitors go through proper recycling channels, until vendor take-back agreements can be negotiated.