

Recycling of electronic items a 'success story' with footnotes

May 14 2010, By Wendy Koch

Electronics in the U.S. are being recycled in record numbers as more states require it and more companies collect and even pay for discarded items, but the gains come with controversy.

Some [environmentalists](#) complain that [recycling](#) is not keeping pace with electronics sales. Some say e-waste is being dumped in [developing countries](#), where toxic materials such as lead and mercury can leach from landfills into [groundwater](#).

"It is a success story, but we'd like to see it get more successful" to keep up with the electronics boom, says Janette Petersen of the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

The amount of recycled items more than doubled from 1999 to 2007, the most recent year for which the EPA has figures. But as a percentage of all electronics, it increased less, from 15 percent to 18 percent.

"The demand for electronics recycling has been growing," partly because of the switch last year to digital TV, says Jennifer Berry of Earth911.com, a private group that keeps a database of recyclers. Last year, she says 31 percent of inquiries involved electronics, primarily TVs, batteries and computers.

Public and private efforts are expanding:

- Vermont became the 21st state last month to enact a law that requires e-

waste recycling.

- Twenty-six companies -- including Dell, Hewlett-Packard, AT&T and Verizon -- have partnered with the EPA on the Plug-In to eCycling program to promote electronics recycling since its launch in 2003.
- Companies such as Gazelle.com pay for used gadgets such as iPods, which they resell or recycle.
- Best Buy and other stores are collecting more e-waste. Target announced last month that it put bins in every store to accept cellphones, MP3 players and ink cartridges.

Jim Puckett of Basel Action Network, a Seattle-based non-profit organization that aims to stop toxic exports, worries that some American companies dump e-waste in China and Africa to save money.

"People are trying to look green, but they're not telling you where it (waste) is going," he says. "You can't turn over your TV to just any recycler." He says it's better to store an old TV than give it to a recycler that may export it to a poor country.

The Basel Action Network announced its e-Stewards program last month to ensure safe handling of electronics by using only recyclers certified by accredited organizations.

It now lists 45 recyclers in 80 locations. Samsung and other companies have signed on. Environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, back it.

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