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E-recycler: Question the handling of CRTs

By: Joe Truini

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Middlebury, Vt. --
August 04, 2003

How do you know if your contracted electronics waste processor is actually recycling your old equipment?

Simple - just ask.

A small Vermont television and computer recycler is suggesting electronic waste generators test their recyclers by doing just that.

Good Point Recycling suggests a simple cathode ray tube recycling test to weed out recyclers that may improperly dispose of scrap equipment.

"We are a very small operation, but we hope to use our hands-on experience to raise the best recycling standards and practices," said Robin **Ingenthron**, president of American Retroworks Inc., which owns Good Point Recycling.

The company recommends obtaining a report from the recycler consisting of two easy questions - How many tons of CRTs and televisions did you collect and how much processed glass did you ship?

CRT glass contains most of the toxic lead in a computer monitor or television set and accounts for about 42 percent of the unit's weight, **Ingenthron** said. Between 25 percent and 50 percent of electronic recyclers' outgoing shipments are leaded glass, headed for glass-to-glass recyclers or lead smelters, he said.

Some companies that primarily accept working units may ship less than 25 percent and others that serve as consolidation points may ship upwards of 75 percent. But no one can repair all the old televisions and monitors they get and any legitimate recycler can document how much CRT glass they recycle annually, he said.

"Most of the recyclers we surveyed in the Northeast were more than happy to provide this type of documentation and applaud the test," he said.

But counting tons may not be the best way to ensure your scrap electronics won't end up in a landfill or, even worse, the subject of a scathing environmental report, said Robert Houghton, president of Redemtech, a Columbus, Ohio, electronics recycler.

"It needs to be documented, in my opinion, not on the basis of weight, but on the basis of individual CRTs," he said. "I don't think it should be that simple. I think it would be too easy to be a charlatan and get around it."

Liability for a corporate client exists on a serial number level and so should the disposition of electronic waste, Houghton said.

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A monitor that shows up in a Massachusetts landfill will be traced back to the company through its serial number.

"I do think you have to control the stuff at the serial number level," he said. "The real question is, 'Is every single monitor being handled properly?'"

Good Point Recycling's system offers a simple solution for electronic waste generators deluged with information, including pledges and certifications that may be difficult to understand, **Ingenthron** said.

"Some of the nonprofits created sort of a Christmas tree of all these questions and things to ask that most town officials don't have time for," he said. "I'm finding they're getting overwhelmed by the amount of due diligence information being given to them."

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