

Resource Conservation Challenge: Green Initiatives—Electronics

With an ever-increasing demand for new electronic gadgets, Americans are storing or discarding millions of tons of obsolete electronic items. Recent estimates indicate that we recycle less than 10 percent of all our unwanted electronic products, which includes computers, televisions, and cell phones, to name just a few. Thanks to collaborative efforts of public and private organizations, we have tremendous opportunities to reuse and recycle this equipment. What's more, as the demand for new products grows, we have even greater opportunities to influence not only their environmentally sound design, but also to get smart about buying and using products that are better for the environment. It's a fact: The environmentally smart design and purchase of new electronic products combined with the reuse and recycling of old ones, saves energy and uses resources more efficiently.

The main goal of the Resource Conservation Challenge (RCC) is to change the way Americans think about waste—to see the value of a used material as a product or commodity, not a waste. We want people to realize their impact on the environment—whether buying a new computer or disposing of an old cell phone. To help make this change happen, the RCC relies heavily on voluntary partnerships to promote and encourage the reuse and recycling of used electronic products. Positive economic rewards and environmental results are moving our partners toward more waste reduction and materials management. By committing ourselves to reduce more waste, to reuse and recycle more materials, to buy more recycled and recyclable products, and to reduce toxic chemicals in electronic products and waste, we conserve energy and preserve natural resources.

Goal: Target All Phases of Electronics Life Cycle

The RCC's main goal for e-waste is to get manufacturers, retailers, consumers, and state and local governments to cooperate in a national plan that:

- Reduces the amount of toxic chemicals used in electronics
- Reduces the amount of energy used by electronic products
- Reduces the amount of manufacturing and consumer waste produced every year
- Provides a future infrastructure for recycling and reusing old electronic equipment

To establish this national plan, the RCC is working with equipment manufacturers and retailers, state and local governments and other federal agencies, large commercial purchasers, and the general public.



RCC Partnerships Address Electronics Life Cycles

RCC partners are working together to harness institutional purchasing power in order to increase the demand for “green” electronics. They also are establishing best practices for the operation and maintenance of electronic products, and providing opportunities to safely reuse and recycle old or unwanted products. Examples of current initiatives include the following:

- **Design for the Environment (DfE) Program.**
DfE works to integrate health and environmental considerations into manufacturing and business decisions. Its goal is to produce products and processes that are cleaner, more cost-effective, and safer for workers and the public. Over the past decade, DfE has identified cleaner technologies and alternative materials that are currently being used in manufacturing electronics.
- **Electronics Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT).**
EPEAT, developed in partnership with industry and government, is an environmental procurement tool designed to help institutional purchasers in the public and private sectors evaluate, compare, and select desktop computers, laptops, and monitors based on their environmental attributes in the manufacturing and use.
- **Federal Electronics Challenge.**
This voluntary partnership works with federal departments and agencies to increase the purchase green electronic products, reduce the environmental impacts of electronic products, and manage obsolete electronics in an environmentally safe way.
- **Plug-In To eCycling.**
Plug-In provides the public with information about, and increased opportunities for, safely reusing and recycling obsolete electronic products, such as computers, cell phones, and televisions. The partnership also promotes shared responsibility for safe electronics recycling with communities, electronics manufacturers, and retailers. The partnership also operates pilot projects that test innovative approaches to recycle electronics safely.
- **Safe Recycling Guidelines.**
Guidelines for Materials Management assist RCC Plug-In partners in ensuring the safe recycling of unwanted electronic products.
- **Partnering with the Mobile Phone Manufacturers.**
The RCC is working with 10 major mobile phone manufacturers to improve the environmentally sound management of unwanted mobile phones.

Resource Conservation Challenge

The RCC challenges everyone to accept responsibility and rededicate themselves to conserving resources. Accepting responsibility for improving our environment means changing our habits, processes, and practices. Everyone has a role. Businesses, consumers, and governments work together to make changes resulting in products designed to be more easily reused and recycled. Manufacturers can make products less toxic and more recyclable, and prevent and recycle waste. Individuals and businesses can change their buying and disposal habits, seeking less toxic products and recycling at every opportunity. For more information on the RCC, see <www.epa.gov/rcc> and the *RCC Action Plan* at <www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/consERVE/action-plan/act-toc.htm>.

Resources

Electronics Industries Alliance (EIA) Consumer Education Initiative (www.eiae.org) is a Web-based resource that provides consumers with information on reuse and recycling opportunities for used electronics. These opportunities include state and local collection programs, charitable organizations, and recyclers that accept used electronics. The information can be sorted by state and county, and also includes a section on national programs. EIA is a national trade organization representing more than 80 percent of the electronics industry.

Earth 911 (www.earth911.org) is non-profit organization that maintains a Web site with community-specific information on reuse and recycling opportunities. These opportunities include state and local collection programs, charitable organizations, and recyclers that accept used electronics. The Web site is sorted by ZIP code and includes resources with information about electronics recycling and the environment.

eBay's **Rethink Initiative** (rethink.ebay.com) offers a fresh perspective on the challenge of e-waste, with information, tools and solutions that make it easy to sell, donate, or recycle used computers and electronics.

The **National Cristina Foundation** (NCF) (www.cristina.org) accepts donations of used computer equipment from individuals and corporations in all 50 states. In turn, NCF directs the equipment to nonprofit organizations, schools, and public agencies that use the equipment for training, job development, educational programs and other related projects to improve the lives of people with disabilities, students at risk, and economically disadvantaged people.

Computers for Schools (www.pcsforschools.org) works to place refurbished computers into the nation's schools and educational institutions.

Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association (www.recyclewirelessphones.org) and its member organizations educate the public on the options available for properly recycling used wireless devices and the efforts made within the industry to improve the recyclability of products. The program promotes the collection of used wireless devices and lists members that collect devices for recycling.

The **Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (RBRC)** (www.rbrc.org) can help people recycle portable rechargeable batteries. These batteries are commonly found in cordless power tools, cellular and cordless phones, laptop computers, camcorders, digital cameras, and remote control toys. RBRC recycles the following battery chemistries: Nickel Cadmium (Ni-Cd), Nickel Metal Hydride (Ni-MH), Lithium Ion (Li-ion) and Small Sealed Lead (Pb).



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