

Choosing a Reputable E-Waste Recycler

Legal and Business Concerns

Certification Programs for E-Waste Recyclers

Choosing a Reputable E-Waste Recycling Company



This document is designed to provide a practical understanding of e-waste recycling, the importance of complying with the Environmental Protection Agency's computer disposal recommendations and their related legal and business concerns, as well as provide businesses with a detailed list of what they should look for in a reputable e-waste recycler.

Executive Summary

Over the last decade, electronic waste (e-waste) has become the fastest growing waste stream in our society. This is directly due to the fact that the technology field is rapidly progressing, causing electronic devices and computers to become obsolete faster than ever before. Between instant obsolescence of our products and our own demand for new technology, e-waste has become a very serious problem to the environment as a whole.

Consider that in 2009 alone:

- 438 new consumer electronics were sold*
- Five million tons of unused electronic equipment was in being held in storage*
- 2.37 million tons of electronics were placed in end-of-life (EOL) management*
- Only a quarter (25%) of these tons were collected for e-waste recycling*

While the general population certainly places its share of old electronics in the waste bin every year, large businesses produce tons of e-waste every time they perform a technology refresh or an IT downsize. It's these entities that face strict penalties and high monetary fines if the Environmental Protection Agency discovers that they are not disposing their e-waste in a means that is safe for the environment.

Because dealing with IT obsolescence is such an active component in today's technology-driven businesses, it has become more important than ever for companies to partner with a reputable e-waste recycler that is adept at providing safe, environmentally-responsible disposal of hardware in a manner that meets or exceeds the recommendations of the EPA.

Why is E-Waste Recycling Important?

It is estimated that between 1980 and 2007, a mere 18% of the millions of end-of-life TVs, computers, cell phones and other related electronics were actually collected for proper disposal and recycling. A whopping 82% ended up in our nation's landfills.

Once in the landfills, the electronic equipment would sit idle; eventually being broken down by the elements or by other garbage being piled up on top of it. Over time, the hardware would end up releasing toxic chemicals into the soil or having them carried away by rain water runoff to where the toxins would then enter local streams and rivers. Or even worse, the equipment would be destroyed in an incinerator, where the intense heat would transform some toxins into extremely dangerous substances like dioxins or polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, which are some of the most toxic substances known to man.

All computer and electronics components contain highly toxic materials, including:

- Mercury
- Cadmium
- Lead
- Arsenic
- Beryllium
- Brominated flame retardants

These and other toxins found in this type of equipment have been linked to cancer, birth defects and other deadly health conditions. Failure to recycle these materials properly places plants, animals and people at risk.

Why Do Some Companies Fail to Practice Proper E-Waste Recycling?

In most developed countries, there is no financial incentive for companies to adhere to environmentally responsible e-waste recycling procedures. If the equipment cannot be sold or reused, then it has no value. Therefore, in order to avoid the costs associated with proper disposal of the equipment, they will often have the electronic waste shipped to landfills in another country where the environmental standards are not as high and where the legal framework and internal infrastructure is too weak to protect the country's workers, communities and environment.

How Can EPA -Compliant E-Waste Recycling be Attained?

It is impossible for a company to properly dispose of their electronic waste without the help of a company that is experienced in handling this type of delicate process. Responsible e-waste recycling is a labor-intensive and sometimes costly process that requires the equipment to be disassembled so the toxic materials can be safely separated from the non-toxic components. Partnering with a company that adheres to the EPA's recommended guidelines is the only way a business can be sure their equipment is being handled and disposed of in a responsible manner.

Legal and Business Concerns
The Environmental Protection Agency regulates and enforces the proper disposal of e-waste materials and companies that fail to follow their guidelines can face strict legal and financial repercussions.

In fiscal year 2009, the EPA issued four Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) administrative complaints against companies for the illegal exporting of e-waste to other countries. Three of the cases were discovered only after the country the e-waste was being shipped to rejected the containers and had them returned to the United States. The EPA ordered each of the companies to submit a detailed inventory of their items and to develop a management and disposal plan for their e-waste. After a thorough investigation, one company, located in

Lakewood, New Jersey, was fined \$199,000 for the illegal exporting of CRTs to Hong Kong in 2007 and 2008. In another case, an Oklahoma company was ordered to collect the e-waste it sent to South Africa and bring it back to the United States to have it properly disposed of.

There is currently no federal mandate to recycle e-waste materials, however; many states have instituted mandatory electronics recovery programs and in some instances, state rules may be more stringent than the EPA's standards. If this is the case, violators will be penalized according to the state's laws.

Certification Programs for E-Waste Recyclers

There are currently two accredited certifications recognized by the EPA for e-waste disposal and recycling – the Responsible Recycling Practices (R2) and the e-Stewards® standards. Both certification programs share practices that ensure the responsible recycling and disposal of used electronics.

Certification in one or the other requires a company to place a high concentration on strong environmental standards while effectively destroying all data on any recordable media, maximizing reuse potential of the equipment, minimizing detrimental exposure to human health or the environment and ensuring safe management of materials by its downstream handlers. Once certified, the e-waste recycler is held to the particular standard by ongoing oversight by the accredited certifying body.

Choosing a Reputable E-Waste Recycling Company

Electronic waste disposal needs to be an essential component of every large company's overall asset management strategy and choosing a reputable company to handle their e-recycling needs is fast becoming one of the most important decisions CTOs are having to make. Knowing what to look for in an e-waste recycler can make all the difference between being a responsible company and one that faces possible six-figure fines and potentially image-damaging investigations.

To find a quality e-waste disposal and recycling company, you should ask the following:

- Does the e-waste recycler adhere to all current EPA guidelines for disposal of hazardous waste?

- Are they ISO 14001 certified and have an established Environmental Management System in place?
- Do they have a No Landfill policy?
- Do they have policies in place forbidding export of the equipment to foreign countries?
- Do they have policies against using prison labor?
- Are all of the company's downstream partners e-Steward Certified?
- Does the e-waste recycler accept all kinds of IT equipment?
- Is the e-waste recycler highly experienced in providing EPA-compliant recycling?
- Does the e-waste recycler destroy all recorded data via DOD-approved methods prior to disposing of the media?
- Does the company have an errors and omissions insurance policy (minimum of USD 1 million) in case they fail to perform the data destruction properly?
- Can the e-waste recycler provide references?

Summary

In summary, an effective electronic waste disposal and recycling strategy is every company's responsibility to maintaining the health of the planet we live on. Every year new research details the accumulative dangers caused by toxins and harmful substances leaking from improperly disposed of electronic equipment and how they negatively affect the environment. As the CIO or IT director, it is essential for you to choose an experienced e-recycling company that can help ensure your company adheres to federal, EPA and state recommendations for the proper disposal and recycling of e-waste materials. Not only is this critical for the environment, but it also minimizes your business' risk. It is imperative that you know under all circumstances that the EPA's current guidelines for compliant computer recycling are being followed in order to be protected from the risks and liabilities associated with the mismanagement of electronic waste.

For more information about responsibly recycling old IT equipment through an experienced, EPA-compliant computer recycler, contact Clean Green Electronic Recycling at 1-877-708-6467 or visit us on the web at www.1888ewaste.com.



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