

TAKING OUT THE ELECTRONIC TRASH IREM Member divulges methods for disposing of e-waste

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IN A RECENT CONVERSATION WITH SOME PROPERTY MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS, ONE PERSON ASKED, "WHAT IS E-WASTE AND HOW DOES YOUR COMPANY HANDLE IT?"

I had an answer ready as my company has recently begun to address the e-waste issue by recycling ink jet and laser copier cartridges.

E-waste is the term used to reference electronic products nearing the end of their useful life, or obsolete electronics or products no longer wanted by the original owner. This can include computers, monitors, televisions, VCRs, copiers, fax machines, printers, video games, cell phones or rechargeable batteries. As the use of technology increases, e-waste is quickly becoming a worldwide problem. The Natural Resources Defense Council reports that in the United States about 130,000 computers are thrown out every day and over 100 million cell phones are discarded annually.

Fortunately, recycling in general is on the upswing and people are increasingly interested in reducing the amount of trash they contribute to the waste stream. This change in attitude toward recycling means property managers don't have to spend as much time convincing their tenants to participate in a good e-cycle program. They

can focus more on creating an awareness of what electronic products and components can be redirected out of the waste stream and provide some means for redirecting them.

The well known recycling mantra of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle doesn't just apply to the environmentally friendly disposal of paper and plastics; it also applies to electronics. Some studies show that, on average, people keep their computers three years and their cell phones two years or less. The frequency of electronics replacement means there is a great potential for reuse by others in need. There are numerous schools, churches and non-profit organizations that would appreciate a donation of serviceable computer equipment, as well as organizations that specialize in receiving the equipment, refurbishing it and directing it to a worthy organization.

It is important to know that many types of electronic equipment contain hazardous materials that can make recycling difficult and expensive. The cost to breakdown and separate the useful materials from an electronic component often exceeds the resale value of the salvaged material. Recently, I saw a program on *60 Minutes* where environmentally concerned citizens were taking their computer monitors to a

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vendors who have committed to standards that assure a high level of social and environmentally responsible e-cycling practices can be identified by their signature on the Electronic Recycler's Pledge of True Stewardship, a document created by the Basel Action Network (BAN), a global organization focused on confronting environmental injustice and economic inefficiency of toxic trade. You can find these companies by visiting www.ban.org.

well regarded recycling vendor. The vendor was then illegally shipping the monitors to China where peasant laborers stripped out the useful components and exposed themselves to lead and other heavy metal poisoning. Electronic components often contain various amounts of mercury, cadmium and lead, so it is important to choose a recycling vendor who is professional and qualified to deal with electronic waste.

An indispensable source for information and support on recycling of all types, including electronics, can be found at www.earth911.org. This site offers a comprehensive do-it-yourself manual for recycling in the workplace. If you did nothing else but send a link to this site to your tenants I bet there would be many who would implement some of the suggested recycling tips. Some of the e-cycle help found there is a directory of manufacturer and retailer take-back programs (many electronic manufacturers and retailers will 'take back' obsolete electronic equipment) and information on how to use them. You can search for e-cycle vendors, learn how to prep your equipment for recycling and learn about "Reconnect," a recent partnership between Dell Computers and Goodwill Industries that employs Goodwill's clients, while providing valuable e-cycling services to business clients. The Earth911 site also has a consumer section that addresses recycling at home.

You can also find excellent resources to guide and support your efforts to reduce the amount of e-waste that ends up in landfills. One of the best is the Rechargeable Batteries Recycling Corporation's (RBRC) Call2Recycle program for rechargeable batteries and used cell phones (www.rbrc.org). You may have seen their collection boxes at various national retailers such as Home Depot, Lowes, Best Buy, Office Depot, Sears and many retail stores. The RBRC collects phones and batteries, reclaims the useable materials from the batteries, and in the case of the phones, refurbishes and resells them. A por-

tion of the proceeds then go to various not-for-profit organizations.

The telecommunication industry sponsors an outstanding resource for information on e-cycling computers, televisions and other electronic equipment. Their Web site www.eiae.org has important e-cycling tips and a useful search feature that allows you to look for qualified e-cycling vendors organized by zip code.

The solid waste management division of many local municipalities offers e-cycling programs and invaluable assistance as well. For example, in my county, that division holds periodic e-cycling collection days and allows businesses to drop off, at no cost, a wide variety of electronic equipment. They also provide various informational brochures and make knowledgeable speakers available to business groups interested in e-cycling.

Another way for property managers to establish e-cycling at their properties is to use the help provided by support organizations. They can partner with the RBRC or similar groups and install collection boxes for spent batteries and used cell phones. They can sponsor e-waste collection days and offer tenants a free, convenient and environmentally friendly means to dispose of their old electronics. Managers can also implement an e-waste awareness program their tenants and give them the tools to implement their own e-cycling solutions.

There are many good reasons to begin e-cycling and there is a wide array of support resources available to anyone interested in e-cycling. My company has found that green management of electronic devices is both good for business and good for the environment. Today's "green movement" has made people sensitive to how their actions affect their business and the planet; they want to take action and reduce their impact. So get started now and lead a successful and sustainable e-cycling program.

SOUP TO NUTS

An important value in using a qualified "refurbisher" is that they will clean the hard drive and clear the computer of all personnel and proprietary information. A good source for help and support in donating computer equipment is www.techsoup.org. They provide tips for donating and help you find a refurbisher in your area.

