

A Citizen's Guide to Producer Responsibility



OR...

WHO IS TAKING OUT
THE ELECTRONIC TRASH?



Electronics, especially computers and televisions, are cheaper and more disposable than ever. They aren't designed to last. Warranties are shorter, maintenance is more expensive, and upgrades are more difficult. And electronics are full of toxic chemicals and heavy metals, like lead and mercury!

Two decades of computers and five decades of televisions are piling up in closets, garages, warehouses and landfills. Scientific testing has determined these materials to be hazardous. Who is responsible for cleaning up the toxic mess caused by electronic waste? Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation believes

in the principle of "Producer Responsibility." We want electronics manufacturers to step up to the plate.

OUR ELECTED LEADERS HAVE PUBLICLY STATED THAT "CORPORATE AMERICA **MUST** BE MADE MORE ACCOUNTABLE!"



| READ MORE... 

The Status Quo: NO Producer Responsibility

OR, HOW ELECTRONIC WASTE HAS BEEN HANDLED UP 'TIL NOW...

Cal Consumer:

“ My computer just died! I just bought the darn thing last year, and it's already out of warranty... I tried to get it fixed, but it's going to cost a fortune. Besides, it's not upgradeable!

I guess I'll have to buy a new model... But then what do I do with the old one? Sell it? It must be worth something... Give it away? But it doesn't work...

Why isn't there a better way to design this stuff so that it can be repaired and upgraded?

Where can I take it to be recycled?

I heard this is full of toxics. I wouldn't want to dump my problem on China or some unsuspecting Third World country...

I want to do the right thing, but how? ”

Silicon CEO:

“ Computer on the fritz, huh? Great! Have I got a deal for you! This new model is faster, more features...does everything but slice and dice... We make 'em fast; we don't make 'em to last... Hey, it's always cheaper and easier to buy new... Besides, why wait to get one fixed when you can buy the newest model with all the gadgets, bells and whistles...

The old one? Not worth a nickel. So give it to charity or your local school. Or just toss it. Let government handle it... Don't you pay taxes? That's what landfills are for...Hazardous waste? Where's the proof? Besides, regulations and fees have a chilling effect on the economy... What's more important, jobs or the environment? Besides, I gotta maintain my profits...

Recycling? You gotta be kidding. There's no money in it. No, I won't take it back. **I sell electronics – after the sale, it's not my problem...** If you want it recycled, ship it to China...there are a billion Chinese looking for work. No pesky regulations there...I'm sure they can deal with it... ”

Rosie Recycler:

“ Recycled electronics? Yeah, there's some good stuff in there. Too bad you can't get to it. **Today's electronics are designed to be hard to take apart!** And labor ain't cheap!

Besides, this toxic stuff is expensive to handle safely. I couldn't begin to tell you what all of it is, let alone the unidentifiable plastics. **I can't make money from recycling unless someone pays me to do it.** How's that going to happen? ”



Xiao GongRen (Young Worker)

小工人

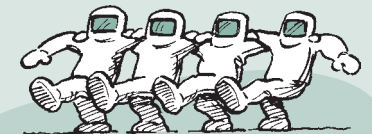
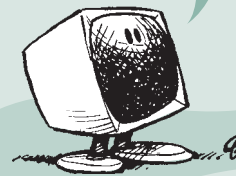
“ Another day, another truckload of computer parts...

Here in China, workers like me make \$1.50 per day tearing these apart... It's long hours and dirty work... My throat hurts all the time.

Why is everyone getting so sick? ”



NOW I KNOW WHY CHIP MAKERS WEAR TOXIC WASTE SUITS.



A New Way of Thinking: Producer Responsibility

OR, THE VERY BEST WAY TO HANDLE ELECTRONIC WASTE TODAY AND TOMORROW...

Rosie Recycler:

“**Recycled electronics? Things are really looking up!** The new models are designed for easy disassembly... with less toxic parts. Much safer for me!

Computer companies are working together to develop environmental design standards for products...and they certify recyclers like me, requiring that **we meet their high environmental standards.**

Now they just use a few types of plastics, all numbered and identified... Manufacturers helped develop great markets for plastics, even ways to process and use leaded glass. They helped finance clean facilities to process toxic electronic waste safely... here in the U.S. — not overseas. **Manufacturers have stepped up to the plate to cover recycling costs** — so we're in business to stay...”



Cal Consumer:

“**My computer just died!** I'll have to check into repairs...and while I'm at it, look into upgrades for speed and memory.

But I might have to purchase new... So what do I do with the old model? Can't dump it... **computers are made better and safer now**, easier to take apart and recycle, but some components are still toxic. So I'm going to do the right thing. I heard they take old equipment at the local electronics store, and down at that repair shop on the corner.

It used to cost an arm and a leg to recycle this stuff, if you could find anyone to take it. **But now the manufacturer covers all the costs...** shipping, handling, disassembly and recycling. Now that's customer service!

And I can breathe a sigh of relief for the environment, and not worry about dumping toxic waste on people in China.”

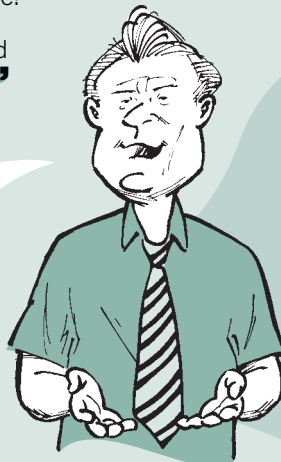
Silicon CEO:

“Computer on the fritz, huh? **Well, let's see what we can do...** We've designed all our products to be upgradeable... Maybe we can get your old unit running and up to speed... If not, check out our new models, all built to our high **technical and environmental standards...**

Now that we take them back, we design them right... They're energy efficient, easy to service, and feature interchangeable, readily recyclable parts low in toxics... **And we'll take care of you as long as you own one of our computers...** When it's time to recycle, just let us know... We're working with retailers to handle your old equipment...

We've developed a network of recyclers to transport and disassemble all our electronics... and they check for quality reusable units, fix them up and provide them to charities and schools.

Best of all, the costs for recycling electronics are already covered. **You won't get charged when you bring it in.** It's all part of doing business...taking care of our customers, our communities and the environment.”

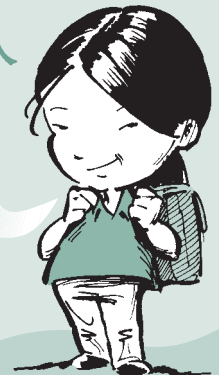


Xiao GongRen (Young Worker)

小工人

“**I'm growing up happy and healthy**, instead of doing that dirty work that hurts my throat!

The companies that make computers set up a new recycling factory for China's own computers. It protects the air and water... My parents work there and I go to school with the money they earn.”



HEY DUDE, YOU'VE GOT A DELL? BETTER TELL DELL TO TAKE BACK COMPUTERS! GO TO WWW.TOXICDUDE.COM.



The Issue

WHAT IS PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY?

We've all heard about the problem – corporate indifference, except when it comes to profits. But what about the solution – producer responsibility?

We expect manufacturers to produce goods in a clean and safe manner – and to make products that can be operated without risk to the user. Why not expect manufacturers to produce goods that can be recycled in a clean and safe way?

Electronics manufacturers believe that handling toxic electronics waste from their products is **your** responsibility; that governments should foot the bill on **your** behalf with **your** tax dollars and utility fees.

Producer Responsibility puts the responsibility for dealing with the environmental impacts of products on the shoulders of those in the best position to do something about it – the manufacturer. By holding manufacturers responsible for the impact of their products, they get the feedback they need to improve designs, remove unnecessary toxic materials, and produce highly recyclable products.

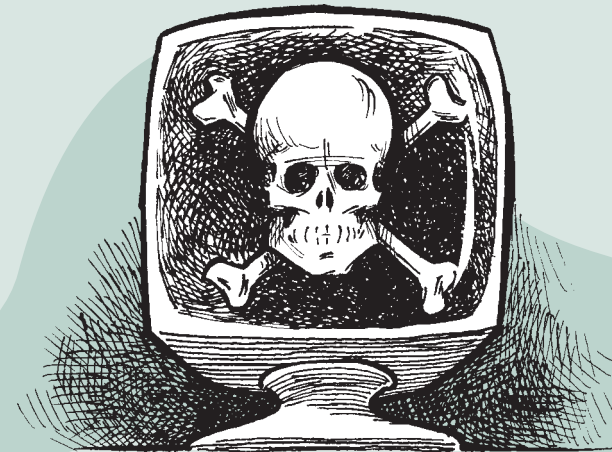
Yes, you'll hear manufacturers say that producer responsibility isn't fair to them, prices will increase, and they will lose sales. But electronics prices are going down, not up. And producer responsibility has taken hold throughout Europe and Japan. U.S. consumers are being left behind in a pile of expensive, toxic and unwanted techno-trash. **Manufacturers accept producer responsibility across the globe, but not in the most technologically advanced country in the world – the U.S.**

Producer responsibility requires that manufacturers be accountable for sound environmental design, safe and efficient operation, and for proper recycling of their products.

Some manufacturers say they address producer responsibility by taking back equipment for recycling.

But these recycling programs are available only to their largest corporate customers, not the average consumer. Maybe they'll allow you to mail back your dead equipment...but it's at your cost. So there is no real financial incentive for manufacturers to design the next product for easy recycling.

Without producer responsibility, spent electronics are sent to our landfills and incinerators, fill up our garages and are even dumped on public lands where they can pollute our water and soil with toxic materials including lead, mercury and other heavy metals. By ducking their responsibility here in North America, the electronics industry has enabled the export of their broken, toxic products to China and Third World countries.



Take this Simple Quiz

CHECK THE BOX NEXT TO THE KIND OF PRODUCT YOU WANT.

THE STATUS QUO	OR...	A NEW WAY OF THINKING
1. <input type="checkbox"/> Difficult to repair and upgrade.		<input type="checkbox"/> Easy to repair and upgrade.
2. <input type="checkbox"/> Contains toxic mercury, lead, and brominated fire retardants.		<input type="checkbox"/> Minimal toxic materials.
3. <input type="checkbox"/> Impossible to disassemble without a sledgehammer.		<input type="checkbox"/> Disassembles quickly for recycling.
4. <input type="checkbox"/> Made with new plastics derived from raw materials.		<input type="checkbox"/> Made with recycled plastics.
5. <input type="checkbox"/> Can contaminate recycling facilities, and can leach toxics in landfills.		<input type="checkbox"/> Safe in recycling facilities and landfills.
6. <input type="checkbox"/> Potentially hazardous to workers, special equipment needed.		<input type="checkbox"/> Safe and easy for workers to handle.
7. <input type="checkbox"/> Uses several types of plastic, mostly not recyclable, not identified.		<input type="checkbox"/> Uses limited types of recyclable plastics that are identified.
8. <input type="checkbox"/> Poor design encourages export to China to exploit cheap labor and lax environmental laws.		<input type="checkbox"/> Can be easily recycled and processed in the U.S. due to smart design.
9. <input type="checkbox"/> Pollution from products requires tax funding diverted from parks, law enforcement, education, and healthcare.		<input type="checkbox"/> Produced with limited toxics and "designed for the environment."
10. <input type="checkbox"/> Requires a larger fee at the time of product disposal.		<input type="checkbox"/> Requires a small fee at product purchase to cover recycling and disposal.

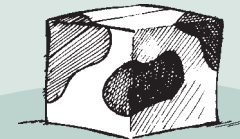
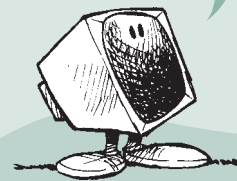
How did you do? We're guessing you picked the items in the right column. You're making perfect sense, but the column to the left reflects the reality imposed upon U.S. consumers by electronics manufacturers.

Other citizens in Washington agree with you too! In August 2002, WCRC conducted a random telephone survey of citizens in King County. Study highlights include:

- 94 percent of respondents agreed that corporations making electronic products should be responsible for designing them to be easily recyclable and less toxic.
- 92 percent of respondents agreed that when electronics contain toxic lead and mercury, manufacturers should provide a safe and convenient way to recycle them.
- 71 percent of respondents would prefer that pre-paid recycling costs be included in the initial retail price (rather than as a separate fee).
- 61 percent of respondents would prefer to take their broken computers back to a retailer for recycling, even if free recycling also was offered at local landfills and transfer stations or through shipping them back to the original manufacturer.
- If a pre-paid recycling fee of \$15 were added to the cost of a television, 86 percent of survey respondents would buy it anyway. Only 8 percent said they would buy over the Internet or in a different state to avoid the fee.
- Faced with a \$20 fee to recycle an old computer system, 55 percent said they would bring the computer in for recycling. But 34 percent said they would store their computer at home instead of paying the fee to recycle it. Only 4 percent admitted that they would put it in the garbage illegally.

Demand producer responsibility. Demand design for the environment. With these principles in mind, the ideals described in the column on the right will become the new reality.

DOES THIS MEAN THEY'RE **MILKING THE PUBLIC**? TELL CORPORATE EXECUTIVES TO CUT THE "BULL" AND STEP UP TO PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY!



Making it Happen

GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY...

Why doesn't government step in?

Government shouldn't control product design; that's industry's job. But government can, with your support, pass producer responsibility legislation that provides industry with powerful, free-market incentives to implement smart design. Up until now, industry has opposed these programs.

Won't the cost of recycling just get passed on to me anyway?

Yes, through the product price or a pre-paid fee. However, there are aspects of producer responsibility systems that achieve cost efficiencies and drive costs down. Therefore, you'll pay less than if you pay a fee at the time you recycle.

Is this just about computers?

Absolutely not. Around the world, producer responsibility efforts are addressing cars, rechargeable batteries, consumer packaging, beverage containers, mercury switches, cell phones, refrigerators, TVs, other household electronics, paint, pharmaceuticals, pesticides, tires, carpet and more!



Act Now!

HOW TO BE RESPONSIBLE AND DEMAND THAT OTHERS BE RESPONSIBLE TOO...

Get the Word out! Be a WCRC Activist!

If you like this guide, give it to friends and mail it to your legislator and the manufacturer of your computer. Help get the word out and bring about producer responsibility in the U.S. For future information, send e-mail to WCRC at: info@wastenotwashington.org

Shop smart – be conscientious. Ask for and buy environmentally sound products whenever and wherever available. When buying a new product, ask if the retailer will take it back when you're done with it. If your retailer doesn't have an existing program, ask if they will give you a purchase credit towards getting it recycled properly.

Return products to retailers and manufacturers that provide reuse, collection, recycling and proper disposal options.

Utilize any existing programs, including mail-back programs. They are at least a start and give all of us a chance to experiment with producer responsibility. Options for recycling electronics and other take-back programs for a variety of items can be found at EPA: Plug-In To Recycling: www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/consolve/plugin

Send messages to CEOs of computer companies and other corporations requesting producer responsibility by going to the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition and GrassRoots Recycling Network sites at: www.svtc.org/cleanc/4ht_letters.htm, www.toxicdude.com or www.grn.org/action. Get toll-free customer service number for most companies at 1-800-555-1212.

Support stock shareholder resolutions calling for producer responsibility.

Many investment organizations have proposed resolutions, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because they consider it a profitable and essential business practice.

Support producer responsibility legislation

when it is introduced. View some local and state government producer responsibility laws or ordinances at: www.productstewardshipinstitute.org/Electronics.htm

Read about Extended Producer Responsibility

at: **INFORM, Inc.**
www.informinc.org/eprgate.htm

Washington State Department of Ecology
www.ecy.wa.gov/sustainability/resources/prod_steward.htm

Learn more about the electronic waste problem and how you can take action at:

Computer TakeBack Campaign
www.computertakeback.com

Basel Action Network
(Exporting Harm report)
www.ban.org

Find other resources you need to be informed about electronics recycling and producer responsibly at:

Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation
www.wastenotwashington.org



Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation

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Seattle, WA 98121-2412

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I'M FULL OF IT—MERCURY, LEAD AND OTHER TOXIC MATERIALS. LOOK INSIDE TO FIND OUT MORE...

What is Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation?

Founded in 1980, WCRC is a nonprofit citizen-based advocacy group working to keep Washington a leader in waste reduction, recycling and use of recycled products. One of WCRC's goals is to organize concerned Washington citizens to insist that manufacturers adopt producer responsibility practices via voluntary agreements or legislation.

JOIN US! WCRC Membership

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

ENCLOSED IS MY TAX-DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTION FOR:

- \$25 Individual
- \$35 Household
- \$50 Small Business/Government
- \$100 Donor
- \$150 Large Business/Government
- \$250 Friend
- \$500 Patron
- \$ _____ Other

PLEASE CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD: _____

- Visa
- Mastercard

EXPIRATION DATE: _____/_____/_____

CARDHOLDER NAME AS APPEARS ON CARD: _____

Mail to: WCRC, 2021 Third Avenue, Seattle, WA 98121. To contact WCRC, please send email to info@wastenotwashington.org or call 206-441-1790. www.wastenotwashington.org

