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Law Boosts e-Waste Recycling, Cuts Government Costs



Easier consumer access to scrap electronics collection sites, spurred by manufacturer funding, has contributed to an increase in e-waste recycling and a decrease in government spending in New York State, according to a new report by the Product Stewardship Institute for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Evaluation of the New York State Electronics Producer Responsibility Law found in the first partial year of the law's implementation, which began April 1, 2011 and ended Dec. 31, 2011, the number of electronics take-back sites had increased by 77 percent across the state, and more than 44 million pounds of scrap electronics were collected. The report says the law saved local governments millions, if not tens of millions, of dollars, by shifting the financial burden of post-consumer product management away from municipalities and toward producers.

Electronics contain potentially toxic substances, such as lead, mercury and flame retardants, which can be released into the environment if not properly managed at the end of their useful life. Electronics recycling helps prevent the release of these hazardous substances.

The report also highlights a number of challenges that need to be overcome if the law is to help New York achieve greater fiscal and environmental benefits.

There is still too little public awareness about take-back initiatives, which leads to lower product recovery rates, it says. Moreover, residents of New York City do not have access to enough convenient collection sites, further reducing participation rates.

Limited resources within the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the government agency responsible for administering the law, combined with a lack of public disclosure of state e-waste collection data, has also hindered program progress. Further, serious inefficiencies in statewide and national recycling markets for cathode ray tubes (CRTs), which are common in older monitors and TVs, have adversely affected the economics for responsible e-waste recyclers.

The report offers a number of recommendations to help strengthen the electronics waste take-back and recycling program created under New York's law. These recommendations include:

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- The state should ensure that adequate funds go to the DEC for proper oversight of the program, rather than allowing them to be used for other purposes, as they are currently.
- The state should require that all recyclers be third-party certified, or that they meet equivalent requirements, to ensure that electronics waste is, in fact, being handled responsibly and safely.
- Manufacturers should improve their efforts to promote the program and educate the public about drop-off opportunities through www.greenergadgets.org.
- All other stakeholders-retailers, recyclers and governments-should also promote the program.
- The state should maintain a ban on disposing of CRT displays-the lead-containing glass displays that are found in most non-flat screen televisions to support the reclamation of CRTs in the recycling market.

eRecyclingCorps, a wireless device trade-in provider that partners with Sprint, Verizon, TELUS and other major wireless carriers, said it exceeded **1.1 million trade-in devices** in May, setting a new record for device collection in one month and diverting more than 450,000 pounds of e-waste from landfills.

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