Choosing An E-Waste Recycler: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

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

Consider that in 2013 alone:
- E-waste in the waste stream totaled approximately 1.87 million short tons. This included discarded TVs, computers, peripherals (printers, scanners, fax machines) mice, keyboards, cell phones and other electronics.*
- Only 40 percent of TVs, computer products, cell phones and other electronics that were ready for end-of-life management were collected for 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 (EPA) 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?

Even though e-waste accounts for only 2% of the trash in our nation’s landfills, it is responsible for more than 70% of the toxic waste. Once in the landfills, the electronic equipment sits idle; eventually it’s broken down by the elements or by other garbage piled on top of it. Over time, the hardware releases toxic chemicals into the soil or rain water runs-off and carries them into local streams and rivers. Even worse, the equipment is destroyed in an incinerator, where the intense heat transforms 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 properly recycle these materials 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 the proper disposal of equipment, companies will often have the electronic waste shipped to landfills in another country where the environmental standards are not as stringent and the legal framework and internal infrastructure is too weak to protect the country’s workers, communities and environment.
HOW CAN A COMPANY ENSURE ITS E-WASTE IS BEING HANDLED PROPERLY?

It is impossible for a company to properly dispose of their electronic waste without the help of an e-waste recycler that is experienced in handing 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 standards 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 EPA 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.

Despite there being no federal mandate for the handling of e-waste materials, 25 states (as of 2014) 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.

Two more recent examples of inadequate and irresponsible e-waste disposal include telecommunication giants AT&T and Comcast. In 2015, both companies found themselves faced with substantial fines due to unlawful disposal of e-waste and other hazardous material.
In the case concerning AT&T, the company was forced to pay the state of California $52 million in January after a nine-year investigation showed that thirteen of the company's processing facilities within the state were sending electronic equipment, batteries, aerosol cans, and other types of e-waste directly to landfills instead of processing and disposing of the items according to state and federal regulations. As a result, AT&T became the first major business to be fined for improper handling of e-waste. The fines included $23.8 million in civil penalties, including $3 million that's earmarked for future enforcement actions, and an additional $28 million to be paid over the next five years to make process changes in an effort to prevent future violations.

In the case against Comcast, California state investigators discovered that the company routinely sent batteries, electronics, aerosols, and other forms of e-waste to local landfills as far back as 2005. It was also discovered during the investigation that Comcast also discarded documents containing sensitive customer data into the trash without taking the necessary steps to make the information unrecoverable. The case resulted in Comcast agreeing to a $25.95 million settlement with the California Attorney General and Alameda County District Attorney.
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CHOOSING AN E-STEWARDS AND R2 CERTIFIED RECYCLER?

Recyclers that are certified in both e-Stewards and R2 are in full alignment with the needs and expectations of their clients. In becoming certified by these two programs, a recycler has proven that they are socially and environmentally responsible, that they are transparent in their downstream dispositions, that they are in full compliance with today’s e-waste handling laws (including the Basel Convention), and that they practice thorough data protection via auditable chain-of-custody documentation and data destruction.

In addition, certified companies are proven to reduce certain environmental and human health impacts caused by improper recycling; increase access to quality reusable and refurbished equipment; and reduce energy use and other environmental impacts associated with mining and processing of virgin materials.

WHY ARE BOTH CERTIFICATIONS IMPORTANT?

Although similar, the e-Stewards and R2 certifications have their differences. As a result, being certified by both proves that the recycler promotes and enforces the responsible recycling of used electronics. Specifically, these certification programs are proof that the recycler adheres to strong environmental standards which maximize reuse and recycling, minimize exposure to the environment, ensure safe management of materials by downstream partners, and perform destruction of all data on all used electronics.
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 have 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:

- Are they e-Stewards 2.0 certified?
- Are they R2:2013 certified?
- Are they ISO 14001-certified and do they have an established Environmental Management System in place?
- Does the e-waste recycler adhere to all current EPA standards for disposal of hazardous waste?
- Does the e-waste recycler accept all kinds of IT equipment?
- Is the e-waste recycler highly experienced in providing EPA-compliant recycling?
- Are they NAID certified?
- Does the e-waste recycler destroy all recorded data via DOC-approved methods prior to disposing of the media?
- Does the company have 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 for 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 risk for your business. 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.

Liquid Technology Certifications

- Liquid Technology is certified in the most recent R2:2013 Standard, meaning that we meet the latest requirements for certification.
- Liquid Technology is certified under the e-Stewards 2.0 Standard. This means we are in full compliance with the most current industry standards.
- Liquid Technology is ISO 14001 certified, meaning that we meet the guidelines outlined in ISO 14001.
- Liquid Technology is OHSAS 18001 certified, meaning that we provide our workers with the safest workplace environment possible, thereby reducing injuries and illnesses as well as mechanical downtime.
- Liquid Technology is NAID certified, meaning we need or exceed NAID's standards and guidelines.

For more information about responsibly recycling old IT equipment through an experienced, EPA-compliant computer recycler, contact Liquid Technology at 1-800-797-5478 or visit us on the web at www.LiquidTechnology.net.
Want to find out more about what Liquid Technology does?

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