



Russian River Watershed Association

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707)833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – December 2012 After the Holidays: Electronic Waste Recycling

The holiday season is upon us once again and we can expect to be surrounded by decorated trees, wonderfully fragrant pine wreaths, and our favorite holiday foods. Many of us are fortunate enough that we will also be surrounded by the gifts we give and receive, including new cell phones, new computers, new TVs and plenty of battery-operated toys.

When getting new electronics, we are faced with what to do with the older ones. If you don't have a use for the old items, what should you do with them? And what about those old batteries, what should you do with them?

Cool on the outside, not so safe on the inside

One thing that you should not do is put electronics or old batteries in the regular trash. All electronics and batteries have been banned from landfill disposal in California. Of course, you should also never litter or dump them. Those cool electronics and the batteries that operate some of them, contain many harmful substances including heavy metals like mercury, lead, and cadmium. When these items enter our landfills, they can eventually leak their contents into our environment.

So what should you do with your unwanted TVs, computers, and cell phones? What about your old batteries?

Does it still work?

Many local thrift stores and retailers accept working and non-working electronics including cell phones. State law requires that retailers selling cell phones take back used cell phones at time of purchase. If the electronic item you're discarding still works, donate it to give it a longer life. In Sonoma County, electronics can be donated to the Computer Recycling Center, www.crc.org, for repair and reuse. For a complete list of drop-off recycling options, visit www.recyclenow.org, use the "What would you like to recycle?" search function at the top of the web page and choose the topic "Electronics". For Mendocino County, visit www.mendorecycle.org and pick the city or town you live in for complete information on where to drop off your household electronics.

Is it broken or too out of date for reuse?

No problem, electronics and batteries can be recycled here in the United States by responsible recyclers. The materials used to make electronics and batteries, including those that are harmful to humans and the environment, can be recycled to create new products.



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How do I donate or recycle my eWaste?

Fortunately, consumers now have many easy options for responsibly discarding electronics. In Sonoma County, most of us have the option of placing our old electronics into our blue curbside recycling bins. Curbside recycling for household electronic devices without screens, not larger than 2 feet in any dimension, is available in all areas of Sonoma County, except Windsor.

Is your old TV too big for the blue recycling bin? No problem. You can call for bulky item pick up. Contact your garbage company directly for a pick up or go to the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency's recycling website at <http://www.recyclenow.org/toxics/electronics.asp> for help.

For locations to recycle household batteries in Sonoma County, visit http://www.recyclenow.org/toxics/house_batteries.asp. You can also call the Sonoma County Eco-Desk phone number at (707) 565-3375. For locations to recycle household batteries in Mendocino County, visit www.mendocycle.org. Mendocino County Waste Management Authority also hosts mobile collection service for hazardous waste (including batteries). Visit http://www.mendorecycle.org/haz_Schedule.html for the Mendocino County's HazMobile schedule.

Retail Store Take-Back Programs

Many of the stores where you'll buy your new electronics will take your old ones back from you and get them to a responsible recycler even if the old item wasn't purchased there. When you're shopping for that TV or computer, ask the sales staff if they will take back your old electronics. A great source of information is at <http://earth911.com/recycling/electronics/proper-disposal-and-recycling-of-e-waste/>.

Responsible eWaste Recycling

What could be irresponsible about recycling? Unfortunately, there are some companies that will take your electronic waste and ship it overseas to under developed countries where they are not responsibly recycled.

Those flyers left on your car or doorstep that ask you to donate your old cell phones or computers might be left by companies that are not responsible recyclers. Some companies will make a profit from your donated items by shipping them overseas to places where worker safety and the environment are simply not considered. When that happens, the toxins in your electronics pollute air, groundwater, and surface water in the poorest parts of the world. Chances are, the workers disassembling those electronics won't even be given protective gear to keep them from breathing in toxic fumes.

There are many convenient locations in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties where electronics are accepted and then properly recycled. The Sonoma County Waste Management Agency, in partnership with Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire holds monthly electronic waste recycling events. Visit



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<http://www.recyclenow.org/toxics/electronics.asp> for more information on upcoming events and drop off locations throughout Sonoma County. Visit www.mendorecycle.org for drop off locations and the HazMobile schedule for recycling e-waste in Mendocino County.

When recycling computers, be sure to erase all data from your hard drive first. Responsible recyclers will have additional methods in place to destroy or shred the hard drives received.

Fundraising with eWaste collection events

When hosting an electronics recycling event, make sure that you or the nonprofit/community group you are working with partners with a company that handles the electronic waste responsibly. Often, the recycling companies that pay the most for your electronic discards are the same companies with the worst records for shipping these items overseas to be handled in ways that would not be allowed here at home. To help you determine which companies provide the best waste management practices which protect both workers and the environment, see the list of certified e-Steward Recyclers at <http://e-stewards.org/find-a-recycler/recycler-listing/>.

This article was authored by both Cristina Goulart of the Town of Windsor and Lisa Steinman of Sonoma County Waste Management Agency on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.