Why recycle electronics?

Here are answers as to why it is important to recycle electronics instead of landfilling or incinerating.

Q. Which toxic substances do electronics contain and why are they believed to be a problem?

A. Most electronics contain some level of potentially toxic substances such as lead, mercury, cadmium and chromium. They may also contain other heavy metals and chemical flame retardants, such as polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs). These substances have been shown to cause a number of problems in humans and animals, including brain damage, developmental problems, cancer, nervous system damage and endocrine disruption.

These metals and toxic chemicals could pollute groundwater, surface water or the air if electronics are illegally dumped or burned. They may also be released into the air if burned in a municipal or waste-to-energy incinerator. If buried in landfills, the pollutants can get into the soil or water when landfill leachate is collected for treatment and the residual effluents are released into surface waters or spread on land.

Q. Why does ACT 50 ban landfilling and incineration of discarded electronics?

A. Computers and other discarded electronics contain valuable and highly recyclable and reusable components whose economic value is lost when landfilled or incinerated. In addition, landfilling and incineration pose potential risks to the environment and public health through leachate disposal and land spreading or air emissions. Banning electronic devices from disposal in landfills or incinerators will also provide further incentives for recycling, the only legal disposal method.

Q. How will ACT 50 affect businesses and institutions?

A. K-12 public schools are covered under the bill along with households, but other institutions and businesses are not. The bill may indirectly increase recycling of retired electronics from businesses, especially from small businesses, by improving the electronics recycling infrastructure and by banning certain electronic devices from landfills or incinerators regardless of their source. Businesses may also benefit because the increased competition should result in more local recycling options. Companies in rural areas may see an even greater benefit with increased access to recycling markets.

Q How many retired consumer electronics are there is Wisconsin?

A. According to the DNR, 80 percent of households have at least one computer, 99 percent of households have at least one TV and 85 percent have at least two TVs. In total, a 2006 DNR study estimated that there are nearly 3.8 million computers and 7.5 million TVs in state households.

- Industry estimates that a computer becomes obsolete in three years, though not all are replaced that quickly.
- Volumes of discarded TVs are expected to grow in connection with the 2009 digital TV transition. While analog converters are available, it is unclear how many consumers will use them instead of buying new TVs.

Go to the DNR website for more information on electronic recycling.
http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/ecycle/
or go to www.dnr.wi.gov and click on E-Cycle Wisconsin