

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR E-SCRAP VENDOR

Buyers of computer and information technology hardware know they have to do their “homework” before they make a purchase. However, their focus is on choosing the right equipment, not on disposing of that equipment when it breaks or becomes outdated. Unlike ordinary institutional wastes, computer equipment can’t just be thrown in the dumpster and hauled to a landfill. However, it’s not easy to find an electronics recycling company that will manage your end-of-life (EOL) equipment exactly as you need it done. The purpose of this document is to provide you with the necessary information to help you find an e-scrap vendor that meets your needs and protects you from liability.

Facts about e-scrap: did you know that...

- Electronics are the fastest-growing portion of America's trash - with 250 million computers destined to become obsolete by 2005.
- More than 3.2 million tons of electronic waste is buried in U.S. landfills each year.
- The average cathode ray tube inside a PC monitor contains about five pounds of lead oxide powder embedded in the glass.
- There are currently an estimated 4.2 million computers in homes and workplaces in Georgia. That number translates to 315,000 tons of solid waste and 26,000 tons of toxic lead.
- Electronics are made with valuable materials. In 1998, over 112 million pounds of materials were recovered from electronics including steel, aluminum, glass, plastic and precious metals.
- Computers have several elements – lead, mercury, cadmium – that are regulated as hazardous wastes by U.S. EPA and all states. Electronics can be an environmental hazard if they are disposed by landfilling or incinerating.

Essential considerations for choosing an e-scrap vendor:

1. **Protect your data.** Computer hard drives usually contain confidential institutional information. You need to be positively sure that this information is destroyed. Especially critical are patient/health care data, personnel records, and financial data.
2. **Protect yourself from potential environmental litigation.** If a “recycler” improperly disposes of your equipment and causes

environmental damage, you may be held responsible.

3. **Protect human health and the environment.** The US has not signed an international treaty that bans the export of hazardous waste to Third World countries. Consequently as much as 80% of our hazardous electronic scrap is being shipped to countries that do not have our strict occupational safety and environmental regulations.

Guidelines for choosing an e-scrap vendor:

1. **Do some background research.** Develop a short list of pre-qualified recyclers. State environmental agencies may be able to provide a list of e-recyclers serving your state but that does not mean they are endorsed by the state.

Computer and electronic scrap recycling companies in Georgia are listed here: http://www.p2ad.org/comp_recycle.html

Listings for e-scrap recyclers in other states can be found here:
<http://www.nrc-recycle.org/resources/electronics/index.htm>
<http://www.nrc-recycle.org/resources/electronics/search/getlisting.php>

As you do your background research, here are a couple of points to keep in mind:

- Some recyclers claim to be "EPA Permitted," "EPA Certified," or "EPA Approved." **However, the EPA has no permitting, certification, or approval process for electronics recyclers.** Many times when these recyclers are asked for copies of their "EPA Permit," "Certification," or "Approval" they offer a copy of an EPA ID number. This typically begins with three letters, including the state initials followed by nine numbers. This is merely an EPA-issued number that is required for manifesting hazardous waste for shipment. Anyone who generates hazardous waste must have one to transport material for disposal. It is not a permit to recycle electronics.
 - Be wary of claims of state "permits." **The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) does not issue "electronics recycling permits."** The EPD does require that a company generating hazardous waste have an EPA-issued ID number.
2. **Ask questions and expect adequate answers.** The four-page checklist that follows is designed to help you collect detailed information about the recyclers you are considering, and to provide you with the assurance that you've selected the proper company.

3. **Audit the facilities.** In addition to the survey, you may decide to perform your own due diligence by arranging for a personal visit and inspection of each recycling company under consideration.
4. **Follow the materials trail** and try to get all of the required downstream information. Here are two tips for following the materials trail:
 - Understand that a *Certificate of Recycling* is only the recycler's own certification of the total weight of material or number of items received on a particular date and confirmation that it was processed "in accordance with all state and federal regulations." For record-keeping purposes, it is good to have a Certificate of Recycling for everything that you send to be recycled. However, remember that this is a highly unregulated industry, and you should conduct your own due diligence to ensure your materials will be properly recycled.
 - Ask the recycler how many pounds of electronics are processed on a monthly basis. Then ask to see documentation showing resale activities and scrap shipments for the previous month, which should approximate that amount. If documentation falls short, you are not getting the whole picture. Moreover, outbound documentation helps to determine if more downstream research is required.
5. **Ask for references** and then contact them to ensure that others have been satisfied with the company services.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact:

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Information for this publication was updated in September 2003 and is subject to change. While every effort has been made to provide clear and useful information, it is the responsibility of owners to properly manage their waste and materials in accordance with any local, state, or federal laws. P2AD assumes no liability for the disposal or management of waste or materials.