

E-waste Recycling Event Will Accept "Anything with a Cord"

Wednesday June 11, 2008

The City of Napa, partnering with Napa Recycling & Waste Services (NRWS) and Napa Valley College, will hold a recycling event for electronic waste this weekend. This annual event has been expanded to become an "Anything with a Cord" event, offering the opportunity to recycle large end-of-life metal appliances such as washers, dryers, refrigerators, freezers, ovens, and water heaters, and smaller kitchen and household appliances such as vacuums, blenders, food processors, microwaves, toasters, coffee makers, and table fans. All e-waste and appliances will be accepted in any amount and free of charge.

The event will be held both Friday June 13 and Saturday June 14 from 9am to 2 pm each day, in the soccer field parking lot on the Napa campus of Napa Valley College.

It is estimated that more than six million outdated computer monitors and televisions are stockpiled in California garages, closets and attics. This electronic equipment can be harmful to the environment and human health if not properly recycled. Many Californians are unaware that it is illegal to throw electronic items in the trash because of the environmentally sensitive materials they contain. A typical television or computer monitor, for example, contains seven pounds of lead.

Reuse of e-waste is environmentally preferable to recycling, and two local non-profit organizations — Napa Valley Computers to Schools and Computer Recycling Center — have teamed up to screen the incoming computer equipment. Both organizations refurbish and donate working equipment to schools, community organizations and others in need. The electronics collected that are not reusable will be recycled by Fresno-based Electronic Recyclers, the largest recycler of e-waste in California, at their facility in Fresno.

Kevin Miller, the City's Recycling Manager, emphasizes the importance of assuring the legal recycling of e-waste. "The Fresno facility is approved by the California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Toxic Substance Control as an authorized outlet and all activities are monitored by a state-of-the-art surveillance and security camera system. All electronic components are 100% recycled and easily traceable using Electronic Recycler's unique bar coded reports," said Miller.

For the first time, this year's event will also accept residential fluorescent lamps/tubes, household batteries and mercury thermometers/thermostats for recycling. Along with e-waste, all of these items fall under a broad category of products that contain hazardous or toxic materials that are so common that they are called universal waste or u-waste. If improperly discarded, the mercury from one fluorescent bulb can contaminate 6,000 gallons of drinking water, while a broken mercury thermometer can contaminate up to 5 million gallons of water. In California, u-waste materials are legally banned from landfill disposal.

At both state and national levels, there are ongoing efforts to establish policies or regulations that reward extended producer responsibility (EPR). EPR refers to the concept of manufacturers (and sometimes distributors) taking either physical or financial responsibility for the products they manufacture, including end-of-life collection, recycling and/or proper disposal. The concept of EPR can offer a "cradle to cradle" view of how products can be transformed from a disposal problem back into new and useful products. Sometimes this can be accomplished through expanded "take back" opportunities (for example, the rechargeable battery manufacturers voluntarily provide a "take back" service free of charge at most retail locations for rechargeable batteries – see www.rbrc.org for more information). Other times, manufacturers can take steps to provide direct recycling collection, such as Hewlett Packard's pre-paid return mailing envelopes for ink jet cartridges recycling that come with new cartridges. Citizens and consumers can visit www.caproductstewardship.org and learn more about what they can do help support the concept of EPR.

The 2008 Napa "Anything with a Cord" event also demonstrates how recycling can have a win-win-win impact on the environment, energy use and the economy. The environment is protected through proper recycling and recovery of otherwise wasted materials. Significant amounts of energy can be saved through recycling metals, plastics and glass compared to the using "virgin" materials. Finally, many local and domestic jobs are created from expanded recycling (e.g., NRWS employees and employees of e-waste recycling companies).

2008 is the eighth consecutive year for an e-waste collection event in Napa. Last year's event produced one of the highest tonnage-per-capita results in the nation.

More information on City of Napa Recycling-Solid Waste Division topics can be found at www.cityofnapa.org/recycle and NRWS program information is available at www.naparecycling.com .