

An Overview of Electronic Waste

Thanks to efforts of the Houston Galveston Area Council of Governments, Fay Watson and I were able to attend a regional recycling round table at the electronics recycler, CompuCycle. As the name of the business and the title suggest, this workshop was an overview of E-Waste and the attempts by our state and local government to tackle the problem. The following information comes from the presentation given by Clive Hess, Vice President of CompuCycle.

What is E-Waste? Electronics that are obsolete, broken, out-of-use, and destined for recycling or disposal. E-Waste includes:

- Computers including CPUs, notebooks/laptops, monitors, peripherals and keyboards.
- Office equipment including photocopier, printers and fax machines.
- Consumer electronics including VCRs, stereos, audio equipment, calculators and recording devices.
- Cell phones, PDAs, and other communication devices.
- Televisions and projectors.

How much E-Waste is out there? The latest estimates from 2007 show the number of units in storage to be 234.6 million tons, with televisions accounting for 99.1 tons and desktop computers weighing in at 65.7 tons. These numbers don't include cell phones, since the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) doesn't track the numbers. We can only guess at the millions of those that are out there in our landfills.

Why recycle E-Waste? Here are some interesting statistics:

- Recycling 1 million desktop computers prevents the release of greenhouse gases equivalent to the annual emissions of over 17,000 passenger cars.
- Recycling 1 million cell phones saves enough energy to power more than 19,000 US households with electricity for an entire year.
- Recycling just 1 million cell phones reduces greenhouse gas emissions equal to removing 1,368 cars off the road for a full year.
- The most important reason is to keep harmful metals such as copper and lead out of our landfills and potentially our water sources.

In Pearland we are fortunate to have a convenient method of disposal for consumers (not businesses) at the Stella Roberts Recycling Center, 5800 Magnolia. The Center is open Monday – Friday from 8:00 – 5:30 and Saturday from 9:00am – 1:00pm. This service is provided by the City of Pearland for the convenience of its citizens. In January 2009, the Stella Roberts Recycling Center began collecting a fee from non-residents of \$50 per 100 lbs for Household Hazardous Waste and \$20 per 100 lbs for electronics. Residents include citizens of Pearland, Brazoria County and the City of Friendswood for Hazardous materials disposal. Friendswood residents require a voucher for electronics disposal. Non-resident vouchers must be purchased at the Pearland Parks and Recreation Center located at 4141 Bailey Rd., Pearland, TX 77584. Credit cards are accepted for vouchers; office hours are 7:30a.m. to 5:30p.m. Monday through Friday and their phone number is 281-412-8900.

Most citizens are not aware of the cost to government for this service; in the first six months of the fiscal year, Pearland spent **\$20,569** to properly dispose of electronics. In addition, most citizens are not aware that the Texas legislature passed a law requiring the manufacturers to offer FREE disposal of electronics (excluding televisions) of their products. Please check our website at <http://www.keeppearlandbeautiful.org/recyclecenter.html> to learn more about the program Texas Recycles Computers. The program is offered to consumers only and does not apply to business and industry. Rather than city and county governments shouldering the entire cost of proper disposal, citizens should look to the manufacturer to shoulder part of this burden. In most cases, the manufacturer will offer a mail-in option or other convenient methods of return.

Please be aware that the last legislature passed a similar bill for television disposal, but Governor Rick Perry vetoed the bill. Think about contacting our state legislator, Randy Weber, regarding the manufacturer's responsibility in proper disposal of televisions. Keep Pearland Beautiful is grateful to the City of Pearland and Brazoria County for their commitment to environmentally safe methods of disposal of hazardous materials.

Comments may be sent to cowles@keeppearlandbeautiful.org or call the office at 281-652-1659.