

Saint Francis Care's e-waste initiatives save environment, costs

Discarded computers comprise part of the fastest growing portion of our nation's waste stream – almost three times faster than our overall municipal waste.

According to the EPA, more than 2 million tons of electronic waste, or “e-waste,” is disposed into landfills each year. Moreover, a significant amount of e-waste is hauled away from American businesses, only to be exported to third-world countries, where it is often dismantled for valuable components under less-than-safe conditions.



Electronic waste contains toxins such as lead, mercury, and cadmium, which can cause long-term damage to our health and environment when improperly managed and disposed.

In recent years, some U.S. hospitals have taken proactive measures to minimize or eliminate the impact of hazardous e-waste on our nation's environment.

Hartford, CT-based Saint Francis Care, the largest Catholic hospital in New England, recently began an e-waste management and recycling program that's not only saving the environment, but valuable dollars as well.

“Back in 2002, we did an environmental audit and discovered that we were disposing of a lot of things that contained heavy metals,” said Robert Falaguerra, vice president for Facilities, Support Services and Construction for the 617-bed medical center. “We knew there was a problem.”

Falaguerra said the facility's Information Services department would remove the circuit boards of computer equipment; and either disposed of the boards and shells as universal waste or recycled them when feasible. The costliest component of the process was the labor involved in removing the circuit boards, he said.

After extensively studying the process, Saint Francis entered into an agreement in 2005 with WeRecycle! Inc., a company that provides environmentally sound recycling services for computers, electronics, light bulbs, batteries, and a variety of other items.

In September 2005, the company signed the Electronics Recycler's Pledge of True Stewardship, which affirmed its commitment to provide the highest environmental and social standards possible for dismantling and recycling of used computers and other electronic devices. Members of the Computer TakeBack Campaign, including the Basel Action Network (BAN), and the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (SVTC), created the pledge. Pledge signers agree not to allow hazardous e-waste, as defined internationally, to

be sent to solid waste landfills, incinerators, prison recycling operations or developing countries. WeRecycle! Also maintains a no export policy of hazardous e-waste to non-OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) member countries.

“The company provides services at a very reasonable fee or free,” Falaguerra said, adding that Saint Francis expects to save as much as \$20,000 a year in disposal and labor costs.

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