



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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"Ecycling" Government Computers Under Recycling Electronics and Asset Disposition Services

Summary

For the first time, EPA is awarding contracts to help the entire federal government recycle or properly dispose of computers and other electronic equipment. The new program will prevent hazardous substances inside these items from entering landfills. For example, each computer monitor contains six pounds of lead. All of this equipment contains components that can be reused in the current marketplace or recycled.

Background

The U.S. government buys seven percent of the world's computers. In fiscal year 2005 alone, EPA expects federal agencies to spend almost \$60 billion on information technology equipment, software, infrastructure, and services.

The government disposes of approximately 10,000 computers every week, a significant number of which are ending up in storage closets, warehouses and landfills, or overseas, where environmental standards are generally lower. If mishandled, toxic chemicals like lead, mercury, chromium, cadmium, and beryllium can be released into the environment. This complex waste stream poses challenging management issues and potential liability concerns for federal facilities. Reuse, recycling, and proper disposal can keep tons of pollutants out of landfills and the environment.

Preventing waste in the first place is usually preferable to any waste management option, including recycling. The best option is to reuse systems and components that are still useful. In addition to being an environmentally preferable alternative, reuse also benefits society. Reuse also includes selling items that the government can't use, an option that also provides money to offset recycling costs. Donating electronics is another way to extend the lives of valuable products and keeps them out of the waste stream for a longer period of time. By donating used electronics, the government allows schools, nonprofit organizations, and lower-income families to obtain equipment that they otherwise could not afford.

If items are no longer useful, recycling is the next best option. Recyclers recover more than 100 million pounds of materials from electronics each year. Recycling electronics helps reduce pollution that would be generated while manufacturing a new product and the need to extract valuable and limited virgin resources. It also reduces the energy used in new product manufacturing.

As a last option, it is important to properly dispose of items that can't be reused or recycled.

What EPA is doing

Under [Recycling Electronics and Asset Disposition \(READ\) services](#), EPA has awarded eight Government Wide Acquisition Contracts (GWACs) to small businesses (three nationwide, three in the eastern U.S. and two in western U.S.). The contractors are Molam International, Marietta, Ga.; Supply Chain Services, Lombard, ILL.; UNICOR (Federal Prison Industries), Washington, D.C.; Asset Recovery Corporation, St. Paul, Minn.; Hesstech LLC, Edison, N.J.; Liquidity Services Inc., Washington, D.C.; Global Investment Recovery, Tampa, Fla.; and Hobi International, Batavia, ILL.

The basic contracts approved Dec. 16 run for one year with up to four possible one-year extensions, with a combined potential value of up to \$9 million.

Under the contracts, companies will evaluate each item and its components, and then, in decreasing preference:

- refurbish and resell them, using the proceeds to offset costs;
- donate them to charitable causes;
- recycle as much as possible; and
- properly dispose of the remainder

Contractors must maintain an audit trail to the equipment's final destination to document reclamation and recycling efforts. The contracts will also maximize revenues from usable electronic equipment currently in storage through a share-in-savings (SiS) program. Under SiS, the contractor will attempt to identify opportunities to save costs associated with recycling efforts and share those savings with federal agencies to offset recycling costs.

The government-wide recycling contract will help federal agencies meet requirements of Executive Order 13101, "Greening the Government through Waste Prevention, Recycling, and Acquisition."

For more information about READ

See the [READ](#) site for more information about this program:

http://www.epa.gov/oamhpod1/admin_placement/0300115/index.htm

What consumers should do with their computers

With these contracts, EPA is helping the federal government handle the flood of old electronic equipment, but everyone else needs to do the same. For more information on how you can help, including lists of recycling programs, see the "[Plug-in to eCycling](#)" site: <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/conserves/plugin/consumers.htm>.

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