

Recycling e-waste (or whatever has a plug)

by

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As you think about “Spring Cleaning” at your home or office, you might consider the experience of the electronic recycling event hosted last October by the Environmental Affairs Committee of the Prudential Center Residents Association at Avalon apartments. Residents enthusiastically responded to the call for responsibly recycling electronic clutter instead of sending the stuff to landfills here and to less developed countries overseas.

The campaign slogan, “**Drop off anything with a plug that goes into the wall,**” resulted in an unexpected total of 4,000 lbs of “E-waste” brought down to overflowing bins in the lobbies of each of our three buildings. People disposed of everything from unwanted TVs, computers, keyboards, printers, cameras, radios, cell/home phones, CDs to modems, baby monitors, heating pads, toasters, digital clocks, and more. Almost everyone had squirreled-away a shoebox full of cables, cords, and adapters stored someplace.

New electronics hit the market every year fueling the desire for state-of-the-art gadgetry while old electronics end up as toxic garbage, despite containing valuable, reusable material. Most people don’t know that **recycling electronics saves resources.**

Some Facts and Figures about the E-Waste/Recycling Story:

- ✓ E-waste is the fastest growing municipal waste in the U.S. (expected to grow 3-5% per year)
- ✓ 68% of U.S. consumers have unwanted, obsolete computers in storage in their homes and also store about 99 million unused TVs
- ✓ 85% of computers end up in landfills (over 100,000 U.S. computers are discarded per day)
- ✓ About 50 million cell phones are replaced worldwide every month; only 10 % are recycled.
- ✓ E-waste contains toxic materials like lead, chromium, nickel, zinc, mercury, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) posing hazards to humans and the environment.
- ✓ E-waste is often exported to China, India, and Africa where children and elderly use crude, unsafe methods to recover valuable metals, risking exposure to hazardous toxins.

- ✓ Poor controls over e-waste recycling in US and elsewhere can cause groundwater contamination, air and water pollution, and health effects in those directly involved.
- ✓ Recycling electronics saves resources (e.g. 6,000 cell phones yield \$15,000 in precious metals like silver, gold, palladium, copper).

For more of the story? Go to any of the following websites:

www.electronicstakeback.com;

www.epa.gov/osw/consERVE/materials/ecycling;

www.facts-about-recycling.com/ewaste.html;

International Basel Action Network Certification (www.ban.org)

Responsibly recycling this material makes sense for health, safety, legal, environmental, economic, and data security reasons.

Avalon chose a nearby recycling company because it is a Certified e-Steward Recycler with high environmental standards. Its factory fully recycles over 95% of all materials for remanufacture and no materials are incinerated, landfilled, or dumped abroad.

On Saturday morning, we celebrated E-week with coffee and donuts and a drawing for prizes. The Avalon building collecting the heaviest total of e-waste by weight won special recognition. The end of the story is that it was a “feel good” effort and many requested that we make it an annual event.

And that’s our story.