

Responsible Recycling of e-Waste

Make sure dangerous components are recycled properly.



The Impact

Ordinances that mandate the responsible recycling of electronic waste (e-waste) will reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills and ensure these materials won't be sent to processing sites overseas that employ child labor, have poor working conditions and present significant environmental hazards.

Where It's Been Implemented

The San Mateo County (Calif.) Board of Supervisors adopted an e-waste ordinance on October 31, 2017. It is similar to one approved by Santa Cruz County, Calif., which went into effect on January 24, 2013.

Description

San Mateo County's ordinance requires organizations hosting electronic waste recycling events to dispose of e-waste collected with a certified e-waste recycler that has been approved by the county. The e-waste collector's name and contact information must be submitted to the county at least 10 days prior to the event and must be posted prominently at the e-waste event. Fines for infractions are modest: up to \$100 for the first offense, \$200 for the second offense and \$500 for each additional violation within one year.

Key Drivers

Electronic waste recycling recovers valuable materials from discarded electronics that can be reused to make new products. It keeps materials out of landfills, reuses already extracted resources and thereby reduces the demand for extraction of raw resources, and reduces pollution and

greenhouse gas emissions. Responsible electronic recycling also protects people from exposure to toxics. It prevents irresponsible e-waste recycling by those companies that transport these goods to countries where regulations are less stringent and workers' protection is nonexistent or poorly enforced. In addition, it creates local jobs for U.S. workers.

Key Factors for Success

Both the cities that sponsor e-waste recycling events and the organizations that run the events must be aware of the ordinance and how to comply. Cities should publicize the ordinance via multiple media channels.

Enforcement will be easier and consumer and vendor confusion avoided if all the cities in the same county adopt the same ordinance. If the county later determines that a change must be made, it will notify cities of that change so they can easily and rapidly update their ordinances, too.

Key Obstacles

This is a straightforward ordinance that has not encountered any opposition.

Next Steps

California's electronics recycling program, which was approved in 2003 and is the oldest in the U.S., charges consumers fees of \$4, \$5 or \$6 when they purchase certain types of new devices, with the fee dependent on the screen size. Ideally, California would require manufacturers of electronic products to build in a recycling fee with the purchase price, known as the extended producer responsibility (EPR) approach. To begin building support for this idea, advocates might work with the California Product Stewardship Council, which consists of local governments, nongovernmental organizations, businesses and individuals that work together to advocate for policies and projects where producers share in the responsibility for managing products throughout their entire life cycles.

References and Resources

- Kevin Lu, Sustainability Specialist, San Mateo County Office of Sustainability, khlu@smcgov.org, 650-363-4698
- Tim Goncharoff, former Zero Waste Programs Manager, County of Santa Cruz, timgonch@yahoo.com
- Doug Kobold, Executive Director, California Product Stewardship Council, doug@calpsc.org, 916-413-5262
- [San Mateo County's electronic waste ordinance](#)
- [Santa Cruz County's electronic waste ordinance](#)
- ["Why Does Europe Have Stronger E-Waste Recycling Than the U.S.?"](#) by Great Lakes Electronic Association
- ["Electronic Waste: New EU Rules Target Throwaway Culture"](#) by EcoWatch

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