

# **ELECTRONIC WASTE**

Electronic waste, or e-waste, is the inevitable by-product of a technological revolution. Driven primarily by faster, smaller and cheaper microchip technology, society is experiencing an evolution in the capability of electronic appliances and personal electronics. For all its benefits, innovation brings with it the byproduct of rapid obsolescence.

According to the EPA, nationally, an estimated 5 to 7 million tons of computers, televisions, stereos, cell phones, electronic appliances and toys, and other electronic gadgets become obsolete every year. According to various reports, electronics comprise approximately 1 – 4 percent of the municipal solid waste stream. The electronic waste problem will continue to grow at an accelerated rate.

Electronic, or e-waste, refers to electronic products being discarded by consumers. These include:

- Televisions and computer monitors
- Computers and computer peripherals
- Audio and stereo equipment
- VCRs and DVD players
- Telephones, cellular phones and other wireless devices

Computer monitors and older television picture tubes contain an average of four pounds of lead. In addition to lead, electronics can contain chromium, cadmium, mercury, beryllium, nickel, and zinc. When electronics are not disposed of or recycled properly, these toxic materials can present problems. Safely recycling outdated electronics can promote the safe management of hazardous components and allows for the recovery and reuse of valuable materials.

## **LEGISLATION ON ELECTRONIC WASTE**

More and more states are drafting legislation for the environment-friendly disposal of electronic waste. States have begun to address the e-waste problem by taking steps to ban cathode ray tubes (CRTs) from landfills, imposing fees to fund recycling programs and having state agencies study ways to reduce the amount of waste.

One model to the e-waste problem is to impose a fee on new electronic equipment that is used to fund recycling programs. Another option to the growth of e-waste is to require manufacturers to develop and fund programs to collect and recycle the devices they make. The benefit of this type of legislation is it makes manufacturers more responsible for coming up with a solution to the e-waste problem by making more environmentally friendly products.