

Recycling Your Electronics

In the November issue of *Quick Connections*, we discussed carbon offsetting. While most offsetting in Ontario is done on a voluntary, retail market, there is one instance where offsetting is mandated by legislation. When you purchase a new electronic device retailers typically charge an additional “Electronic Recycling Fee.” This fee is remitted to the Ontario Electronic Stewardship (OES) to implement electronic waste diversion programs under the *Waste Diversion Act, 2002*. As a business in Ontario, it’s your legal obligation to dispose of your used electronics in a responsible way.

The Electronic Recycling Fee is not considered a tax, since the money goes to OES, which is comprised of over 600 electronics manufacturers and retailers, including Best Buy, Future Shop, and Staples. The fee is intended to cover their costs for the collection, transportation and end-of-life management to most used electronic devices. OES is accountable to Waste Diversion Ontario, a non-crown agency of the Ministry of the Environment.

Why the focus on electronic devices?

Electronic devices like computer circuit boards, monitors, cell phones, and lithium batteries contain lead, mercury, and cadmium. Even a trace amount of toxic chemicals can contaminate soil and drinking water for a large area. Older, bulky CRT monitors and TVs, which contain a large amount of lead, pose a significant problem as more consumers opt for flat-panel, LCD and LED screens.

How does the program work?

Many municipalities are implementing their own programs for curbside collection. You can also take your used electronics to many drop-off points, including major retail chains. Visit www.recycleyourelectronics.ca to search for a facility

by postal code. This will ensure the facility you visit is OES-approved. This is important as there are reports of improper disposal, including re-selling used parts to developing nations without strict regulations for managing toxic waste.

Ontario Electronic Stewardship also has a “Host Your Own Event Toolkit” on their website which can help you engage tenants to recycle their used electronics properly. It is also helpful to inform tenants about local drop-off locations and why they shouldn’t discard old electronics in the garbage.

The current list of approved products include:

- Desktop and laptop computers
- Monitors and Televisions
- Computer peripherals
- Printers
- Cellular phones
- Telephones
- Cameras
- Radios, speakers, and other audio equipment
- Video recorders and players/projectors



It's Better to Re-Use

Even with municipal and industry-led options for recycling, it's always better to give your used electronics a second life and help out someone in need. You can find several OES-approved re-use providers on the OES website. For example, Cyber Equality (a.k.a. Free Geek Toronto) is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization that collects used electronics, refurbishes them and donates them to people in need or sells them in their thrift shop. Currently, Free Geek Toronto is refurbishing computers for tenants impacted by the 200 Wellesley Street fire last year.



TIP:

Make sure you properly clear all your personal information from computers and cell phones before you drop them off. This is sometimes referred to as "digital shredding." Collectors can provide this service for a small fee, or you can consult the manufacturer or find DIY resources on the web.

Got a Going Green story you would like to share?

Contact Neel Modi at
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