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Best Buy tests recycling

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Consumer electronics will be accepted for free over the summer; limit is two items a day

By Andrea K. Walker | Sun reporter
June 3, 2008

1 2 3 next

Got electronic junk?

This summer you'll have another option for getting rid of it.

[Best Buy Co.](#), announced yesterday that Maryland is one of eight states where it is testing a pilot program that allows consumers to get rid of old computers, televisions, cell phones and other outdated electronic gadgets for free.

Consumers will be able to bring two items per day to a Best Buy store for recycling under the program, which began Sunday.

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Other Maryland stores:

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The test program is expected to run at least through the summer and, if it works, will be expanded to the retailer's 922 other stores, said Kelly Groehler, a spokeswoman for the company, the nation's largest electronics seller.

Environmental groups and experts from the electronics industry say the Best Buy program is one of the most extensive started by a retailer. Typically, retailers schedule limited recycling days throughout the year.

"The scope of what they're doing is admirably large and I think is unprecedented," said Conrad MacKerron, director of the corporate responsibility program for San Francisco-based As You Sow, which had filed a shareholder request asking the company to adopt an electronics recycling program.

The group withdrew its request after Best Buy said it was already exploring options.

"I think this is the future of where we need to go with recycling. If you can make it almost as convenient to recycle as you can to buy electronics, you'll have a higher percentage of people who will do it," MacKerron said.

Best Buy is launching the program at a time when the disposal of unwanted electronic devices is an increasing problem as consumers constantly upgrade to the latest in technology trends.

Old gadgets represent less than 2 percent of the nation's total waste stream, but are one of the fastest-growing forms of waste, according to environmental groups.

Unwanted electronics such as television sets, personal computers, printers, scanners, fax machines, computer mice, keyboards and cell phones totaled about 2 million tons in 2005, according to the most recent statistics available from the Environmental Protection Agency.

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About 80 percent to 85 percent of that, or 1.5 to 1.9 million tons, was thrown out, primarily in landfills.

The problem is expected to balloon in coming months as consumers try to get rid of obsolete analog televisions before February, when the unprecedented government-required shift to digital television broadcasting takes effect.

Electronic devices contain toxic materials that can pose environmental hazards if dumped in a landfill. Computer monitors and older televisions contain lead that requires careful handling. They can also contain harmful materials such as chromium, cadmium, mercury, beryllium, nickel, zinc and brominated flame retardants, according to the EPA.

Best Buy has been a host for recycling events since 2001 and started in-store recycling in 2004. The retailer already has recycling kiosks at the front of stores for ink cartridges, rechargeable batteries, cellular phones, compact discs and DVDs.

It will also haul away old appliances when a new one is bought from its store. For a charge of \$100, it will remove two appliances even if a new one isn't bought.

"We were already recycling, but we saw an increase in our customers' needs for it," Groehler said.

Items Best Buy won't accept in the new program include televisions larger than 32 inches, air conditioners, microwaves and appliances.

Best Buy has partnered with [Ellicott City](#) firm E-Structors Inc. to recycle goods collected in Maryland and Washington.

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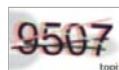
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There is no federal electronics recycling program, and only about a dozen states, including Maryland, have passed legislation addressing the issue.

Maryland's legislation, passed last year, requires manufacturers who make computer and video display devices to pay a \$10,000 first-year fee that helps support recycling programs in the state. The fee for every year after that is \$5,000 unless the company comes up with its own electronic recycling program. Then it drops to \$500.

Surveys have found that consumers want to recycle electronics, but don't know how. The Consumer Electronics Association created a Web site, www.mygreenelectronics.org, to help people find recycling centers after it conducted a survey that found seven out of 10 people didn't know where to go to recycle electronics.

"Retailers have collection events from time to time, but they're a one-time collection event at a particular store," said Parker Brugge, the trade group's vice president of environmental affairs and corporate sustainability. "This will be different because it will be a standing program at each of its stores."

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