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A Major Dent in Mountains of Waste: Best Buy Offers Free Electronics Recycling in 117 Stores After Dialogue, Agreement With As You Sow

SAN FRANCISCO - June 2, 2008 - U.S. consumers toss a staggering 400 million TVs, radios, computers, VCRs, MP3 players and other electronics every year. Beginning today, a unique free electronics take back pilot program that emerged from a dialogue between As You Sow and electronics retailer Best Buy aims to put a huge dent in the mountains of scrapped semiconductors, silicon, circuit boards and capacitors.

As You Sow, an investor corporate accountability group that has prodded several major U.S. companies to develop consumer-friendly electronics take back policies, filed a shareholder proposal last fall with Best Buy Co. Inc., the largest U.S. electronics retailer, asking it to test free take back in its stores. The company agreed, and the program represents the first on-going free take back of consumer electronics offered by a major retail chain. Best Buy will accept electronics at 117 stores in the San Francisco, Minneapolis and Baltimore/Washington, DC metropolitan areas.

Only a small amount of discarded electronics, about 12 to 15%, is being collected. The lack of a convenient network of sites for consumers to return used electronic equipment may play a significant role in the low recycling rate. There is also growing concern about the "Digital Deadline," the potential dumping of up to 30 million TVs by consumers in late 2008 and early 2009, due to the switch to digital TV reception next February, and the need to provide a network of take back sites for those discarded sets.

"We salute Best Buy for taking the initiative to test free electronics take back at a significant number of its stores," said Conrad MacKerron, director of As You Sow's corporate social responsibility program. "Making electronics recycling almost as easy as purchasing these goods has the potential to simplify recycling efforts for millions of consumers who may be confused about where to recycle goods in their area."

The shareholder proposal was withdrawn after an agreement by the company in April to test in-store recycling. Previously, both Apple Inc. and Dell Inc., improved their computer recycling policies and set higher take back goals after discussions with As You Sow, which represents shareholders focused on corporate social and environmental responsibility.

Best Buy's willingness to use stores as a recycling point could also provide a way for TV manufacturers to take responsibility for recycling using the established U.S. retail infrastructure. "Best Buy's action demonstrates a good faith effort to deal with electronics recycling for the short term," said MacKerron. "However, we believe most collection and recycling costs should ultimately be borne by electronics manufacturers." Sony is the only TV brand that has agreed to take back its products for free. Absorbing recycling costs provides incentives for manufacturers to design future products in way that reduces those costs.

Best Buy says it is contracting with recycling vendors to reuse or recycle collected equipment, and has agreed to use vendors who will employ best recycling practices and not allow improper export of hazardous waste. As You Sow urges the company to be diligent in ensuring that these vendors follow through on commitments to not export hazardous waste.

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