

E-Waste

Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt

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Thank you for the article (12-11-06) in the Pioneer Press about people dumping their old TV's and computer monitors in ditches or parks. This is an important issue for Minnesota's environment. The article left many of us thinking, "good grief, there MUST be a better way."

I've been following this issue with great interest for years. Like the other county officials quoted in the article, and as a leader on recycling and environmental issues, I have seen this problem growing. The good news is, this a problem that has some potentially simple solutions.

Banning TV's and Monitors from landfills is only part of the solution to this problem. The Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) in TVs and Monitors contain toxic materials and must be dealt with in special ways to prevent those elements from leaching into our soil and water. We must work together to create a solution that encourages compliance, protects the environment and fairly distributes the cost of doing so.

The article noted how many people dump "illegally" in legal locations, meaning they drop off a TV or computer monitor near a public dumpster or at a recycling center after hours. While that's illegal and irresponsible, it tells me these folks at least want to have the disposal handled properly. What they disagree with is bearing the cost of disposal. We need to devise a system that shares the responsibility fairly – we must all step up to the plate, manufacturers, government, retailers and consumers.

Hennepin County has been a champion of the environment by deciding to simply cover the cost of recycling CRTs in their budget. But property taxes are not going to solve this problem in the long run. With the conversion to digital signal television in February 2009, when our analog televisions will not work without a conversion box, this problem will skyrocket. The legislature must help design a system that ties the cost of recycling into the product and does not rely on local property taxes.

The bill that came from the E-waste Task Force last year made sense. The manufacturers build the cost of disposal into the sale price, which solves the future problem, and the legislation provides for a mechanism to deal fairly with the issue of all those old computers and televisions lying around right now. County Leaders, experts and professionals in recycling, several manufacturers, retailers and waste haulers are in support of this proposed solution.

In the end, there is a better way. By passing e-waste legislation in 2007, we can fairly share the financial burden of recycling old televisions and computers, which will help to keep our air and water clean for generations to come.

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