

## E-waste still being exported, says watchdog



*Ghana is swamped by old cathode ray televisions. (Basel Action Network)*

**Consumers advised to check recyclers' credentials before tossing old TVs**

As more people replace their old televisions with flat-panel screens, a toxic-waste watchdog is warning that many e-waste recyclers are still illegally shipping old TVs to developing nations.

"We predicted a tsunami of [cathode ray] TVs and it's unfortunately turning out to be true," said Jim Puckett, executive director of the Seattle-based Basel Action Network, which advocates for proper disposal of the mountains of e-waste produced every year.

Puckett advises consumers to bring their old TVs to municipally run depots and to avoid private recyclers that promise environmentally safe disposal.

"The so-called recyclers out there are not really recycling. What they're doing is loading up containers and shipping things off and it's too easy, even in Canada, where you are a party to the Basel Convention," said Puckett in an interview with CBC News.



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The Basel Convention is an international treaty to minimize and control and movement of hazardous waste.

Puckett estimates 80 per cent of private recyclers in North America export e-waste to developing nations, where workers break down old TVs and computers using dangerous methods to get at raw materials.

He visited Ghana in late November, where a lot of e-waste ends up and said the African country is swamped with old televisions.

"They're getting way more than they can deal with," he said. "So many people are getting rid of perfectly good ones."

The export of e-waste is not as dire in Canada as it is in the U.S., where there are no export regulations. In Canada, exporting e-waste to developing nations is illegal. Puckett said it still occurs because of a lack of enforcement.

Almost every province in Canada has, or is in the process of developing, industry-led programs to ensure e-waste is disposed of in a safe, environmentally friendly way. Most provinces prohibit such waste from going to landfills.

In B.C., more than 1,300 metric tonnes of e-waste is collected every month from 97 depots. Of that, televisions make up between 70 and 80 per cent, said Joyce Thayer, executive director of the Electronic Stewardship Association of B.C.

"There is a trend in the replacement of old TVs, but it's been going on for some time," Thayer said in an interview with CBC News.

The B.C. stewardship, composed of electronics retailers and producers, deals with five approved recyclers that have been audited to ensure they don't export e-waste. Instead, it is safely dismantled and some of it smelted by the resource company Teck. In fact, medals for the Vancouver Olympics will be made with metals extracted from e-waste by Teck.

Geep Global, a Barrie, Ont., based recycler has seen a "tremendous increase" in the number of CRT TVs and computer monitors they process since becoming an approved member of the Ontario Electronic Stewardship.

"It's changed our whole monitor line, made it much busier," said Chris Gariepy, Geep's vice-president of international marketing.

Asked where the monitors would have gone before the Ontario program came into force in April 2009, Gariepy said much of it would have ended up in the landfill.

Flat-screen televisions were among the only products that did not decline in sales during the recession.

The U.S. is still in a TV-upgrade cycle. American digital research firm iSuppli estimates that 33.8 million flat-panel sets were shipped in the U.S. in 2009, up 17 per cent from 2008.

A major reason is that prices keep declining — a 32-inch flat panel can now be had for just over \$300 US, which is about what old tube TVs used to cost.

Samsung Electronics Co. recently reported that sales of LCD televisions with LED backlight technology surpassed an initial target of two million units in 2009 and will grow nearly fourfold to 10 million this year, according to the Wall Street Journal.