

States pushing for e-waste recycling

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Frustrated by inaction in Congress, a growing number of states are trying to reduce the rising tide of junked TVs, computers and other electronics that have become one of the nation's fastest-growing waste streams.

Nineteen states have passed laws requiring the recycling of old electronics, which contain both precious metals and toxic pollutants and are piling up in garages and closets — or worse, getting dumped overseas. Thirteen other states are considering laws.

But as these state measures take effect, the electronics industry is pushing back against what it calls a hard-to-follow "patchwork."

Two trade groups, the Consumer Electronics Association and the Information Technology Industry Council, are suing New York City over its recycling law, which will make electronics manufacturers provide free collection of electronics weighing more than 15 pounds. That includes "orphan" waste made by now-defunct manufacturers.

The groups contend the law, which requires detailed paper trails documenting their recycling, will cost their member companies more than \$200 million annually.

Parker Brugge, the Consumer Electronics Association's vice president of environmental affairs and industry sustainability, said the states' laws burden manufacturers with drafting state-specific recycling plans. His group would prefer a national e-waste law that sets a uniform policy and spreads the responsibility of recycling among

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companies, consumers and local governments.

Barbara Kyle, national coordinator of the Electronics Takeback Coalition, a group that promotes e-waste recycling, thinks manufacturers really want a national policy with less teeth than the state laws.

"They talk about how much they want a federal bill, but what they want is a weak federal bill. They don't want to have to do what the state laws are making them do," she said.

Several e-waste bills have been introduced in Congress over the years but none has passed.

In April, the House authorized the Environmental Protection Agency to award grants promoting e-waste recycling. The Senate has not yet voted on it.

Meanwhile, the amount of e-waste grows. In 2007, Americans disposed of 2.25 million tons of TVs, computers, cell phones, fax machines, printers and scanners. That's more than twice the amount generated

in 1999, according to the EPA.

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The EPA says stringent landfill regulations keep those toxic materials from posing significant threats to the nation's groundwater. But millions of tons of e-waste are shipped each year to developing nations, where scrap yards crush or burn components, exposing workers to dangerous fumes.

Most of the state e-waste laws make electronics manufacturers responsible for collecting and recycling their discarded products at little or no cost to consumers — who increasingly are being banned from set-

ting electronics out for regular trash pickups.

Some of the laws specify how convenient companies must make it for people to dispose of old electronics, while others set collection goals companies have to meet.

Companies are generally given the flexibility to decide how they will reach those targets. They can stage periodic collection events, for instance, or they can count products collected by their own recycling programs or ones run by municipalities and nonprofits.

About half the states require electronics manufacturers to handle not only their own products but also varying amounts of the "orphan" devices that consumers drop off, said Jason Linnell, executive director of the National Center for Electronics Recycling.

Only one state, California, makes consumers pay upfront for e-waste recycling. Under its law, consumers must pay between \$8 and \$25 above the price of TVs, computer monitors, laptop computers and portable DVD players.

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