COMPUTER RECYCLING GUIDE

When our home computer becomes obsolete and is replaced by a newer or faster model, the old computer becomes a waste management challenge. Businesses and residents of Wisconsin must recycle computers or manage them as a hazardous waste. Recycling is the preferred management method as it is generally a less expensive option.

Why recycle used computers?

Computers contain hazardous materials that can be harmful to the environment or human health if they are disposed of improperly. Lead, mercury and other heavy metals are recovered through the recycling process. Precious metals, glass, plastic, and steel components are also recovered in the process.

After computers and other computer components are collected for recycling they are taken to processing facilities. The computers are disassembled or “demanufactured” into specific components. Workers and recycling equipment remove and separate components that are still in usable condition. Hard-drives, central processing units and memory boards are often sold for reuse.

Plastic and steel frames are removed and sent to plastic or metal recyclers. The monitor, which may contain up to 8 pounds of lead, is sent to a recycler to be manufactured again into new monitors. Circuit boards that are not reusable are shredded and melted to recover precious metals.

Where can you recycle your computer?

Collection events for home computers are commonplace even in rural parts of the state. An up-to-date listing of computer and electronics recyclers can be found on the Wisconsin Recycling Markets Directory website as well as on the Wisconsin DNR’s E-cycle program.

Tips for Recycling

- **Be prepared to pay for recycling.** A typical home computer will cost between $15 and $30 to be recycled. While the computer recycler receives some revenue from the sale of recovered materials, the cost of disassembly is usually greater. Wisconsin’s E-Cycle program has significantly reduced the cost to residents for recycling. In many communities you can now recycle your computer, monitor or television for little or no cost.

- **Leave boxes and packaging materials at home.** At collection centers and events computers are sorted by components into shipping containers. The process runs more smoothly if you leave the boxes at home (recycle the cardboard).

Online Lists of Recyclers

E-cycle Wisconsin program - [http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Ecycle/](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Ecycle/)

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