

Wisconsin Electronics Recycling Law

In October 2009, Governor Jim Doyle signed Wisconsin Act 50 into law. The purpose of this law is to create a program for the collection and proper recycling of certain electronic devices. The law also prohibits certain electronics from being disposed in landfills or incinerators.

The Wisconsin Electronics Recycling Law will create requirements for manufacturers, recyclers and collectors to ensure the environmentally-friendly collection and recycling of electronic devices. Another goal of the Law is to minimize the impact on the end consumer. The majority of the requirements and responsibilities lay primarily on the manufacturer, then local and county governments, as an effort to lessen the impact on the end consumer.

Why do we need to recycle electronics in Wisconsin?

Electronics, including computers, computer peripherals, televisions, cell phones, printers and other electronics contain many known harmful materials such as lead, mercury, chromium and many others. When improperly disposed, these hazardous materials can leach into the surrounding environment and affect both human health as well as the surrounding ecosystem. Improper disposal may also expose waste management workers to additional risk.

Also, proper recycling of electronics ensures the reuse of as many materials as possible. This reduces the environmental impact of consumer electronics as well as lowers the economic costs for the manufacturer.

In 2006, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources completed a recycling survey. The results highlighted that in 2006, nearly 4 million computers, 7.5 million televisions, and 3.5 million cell phones were owned by Wisconsin households. These numbers are not insignificant. As these products wear out, electronic waste increases yearly. Proper recycling is necessary in order to ensure the lowest environmental impact occurs from the disposal of these electronics. It is important that recycling be managed properly to protect the environment, preserve important natural resources and to boost the state's economy.

Details about the law

After 1 September 2010, all Wisconsin residents, K-12 schools and Milwaukee Parental Choice Program schools must abide by the Wisconsin Electronics Recycling Law. Wisconsin residents are prohibited from disposing of specified electronics in landfills or incinerators. While a fee may still be imposed by collectors or recyclers for the recycling of the electronic device, this law was designed to make recycling easier and more convenient statewide, especially in rural areas.

This law should not cause a drop in the variety of electronics sold in Wisconsin. A full list of manufacturers already signed onto the program as well as electronic devices covered under this law is available at the WDNR website.

Also, many retailers in Wisconsin already collect electronics for proper disposal. In the Green Bay/Brown County area a variety of options already exists. Best Buy in Ashwaubenon collects electronics. In Green Bay, the Brown County Household Hazardous Waste Facility, as well as Milwaukee PC, Paragon Green LLC and Lamp Recyclers, Inc. accept electronics for recycling.

As a note, some of these collectors may charge a fee for some or all of the types of electronics accepted under this program.

Furthermore, not all electronic devices are covered under the Electronics Recycling Law. Devices required to be recycled under this law are labeled as Covered Electronic Devices (CEDs). Devices able to be counted towards the obligations required of manufacturers, but not required to be recycled are known as Eligible Electronic Devices (EEDs).

CEDs include the following:

- Computers (i.e., desktop or laptop computers);
- Desktop printers and printer/fax/copier/scanner combinations; and
- Video display devices, including televisions, laptop computers and computer monitors with displays of at least 7" in the longest diagonal direction.

EEDs include:

- All of the CEDs listed above;
- Computer peripherals, including keyboards, mice, hard drives and other devices;
- Fax machines; and
- DVD players, VCRs and other video players (i.e., DVRs).

EEDs do not include cell phones, digital cameras, or music players such as iPods.

Also under the Wisconsin Electronics Recycling Law, provisions were added prohibiting the incineration or disposal in a landfill of the following devices:

- consumer computers;
- consumer printers;
- consumer video display devices;
- computer peripherals;
- fax machines;
- DVD players, VCRs and other video players (i.e., DVRs); and
- phones with video displays (i.e., cell phones).

This prohibition is imposed on any person, business or entity in Wisconsin. Unlike the above recycling program, there are no regulated and non-regulated areas. This is a statewide ban no matter the origination of the devices, households, schools, businesses, governments and institutions included.

List of registered manufacturers: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/wm/ecycle/manufacturers.htm>

More information in regards to CEDs and EEDs:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/wm/ecycle/devices.htm>