

**Testimony to the  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Environmental Resources and Energy Committee  
Computer and Electronics Recycling  
March 16, 2004**

**John Frederick  
Executive Director  
Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania**

The Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania (PROP) is the Commonwealth's affiliate to the National Recycling Coalition and boasts nearly 450 members. The membership comes from the public and private sectors, from the recycling and composting industries, and from a number of specialty recycling entities.

A large portion of the special municipal waste and hazardous materials programs in the Commonwealth are handled or administered by local and county government.... Though the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) provides considerable financial support for many of these programs, private recyclers, municipalities, counties, and solid waste authorities also invest a significant amount of money, labor, and resources.

A growing number of these special materials collections are now including electronics. DEP includes electronics as one of the eligible materials under their Household Hazardous Waste Grant program. This grant program reimburses 50% of eligible expenditures for electronic, tire, and household hazardous waste (HHW) collection and recycling programs. The grant awards are capped at \$100,000 per county.

The amount of obsolete electronics coming into the waste stream continues to escalate and most of these items contain a number of toxic materials. The proper handling of this equipment is extremely important. Fortunately, the recycling infrastructure for these materials, like other hazardous wastes, has grown significantly in the last five years. Yet despite these positive developments, concerns remain over responsible and environmentally sound electronics recycling.

Stories abound describing Asian children tearing computers apart in deplorable conditions, machines being smashed by sledge hammers, and other unacceptable practices that expose workers to toxic materials and increase the chances of these pollutants being dispersed in the workplace, the atmosphere, and local water supplies.

In response to these concerns, PROP actively encourages its members to be thorough in selecting their electronics recycling service providers, holding them to the highest standards possible and making certain that the materials are being handled properly and truly being recycled. We hope that DEP will continue to refine its regulatory and bonding requirements to encourage responsible computer recycling. From our perspective, these requirements remain a work in progress and we hope that the department will continue to:

- Communicate with stakeholders to finalize a process.
- Treat all recyclers, whether they are for-profit companies, non-profits, or quasi-governmental entities, by the same regulatory standards.
- Protect the environment without discouraging modest sized recycling operations or programs.

If electronics recycling is to continue growing, it is imperative that it be convenient and affordable. The overwhelming amount of material projected to be generated in the next few years, piled on top of a backlog of stored obsolete equipment, presents us with a significant challenge. For while the processing infrastructure has grown, the collection infrastructure is still developing in much of the state.

A national strategy for electronics would certainly make sense, but the two year effort of the National Electronics Product Stewardship Initiative (NEPSI) has demonstrated that a national plan may still be a long way off. So it is important that states contemplate how they can make electronics recycling work until the national issues are resolved.

PROP agrees that some sort of “shared responsibility” model for electronics recycling would appear to make sense. A cooperative venture among a diverse group of recycling partners seems to be a fair, practical, and palatable way to meet this goal. In an ideal world, electronics manufacturers, retailers, consumers, recyclers, and local and state government should all take a role in facilitating electronics recycling.

Beyond the obvious need for communication and cooperation among these parties, manufacturers must also design and produce computers and peripherals that are recycling friendly. Like far too many consumer products, recyclability is too often ignored, making computer recycling more difficult and expensive than it should be. Since these issues are best addressed at the national

level, we encourage Pennsylvania's legislators and recyclers to raise these issues with our Congressional delegation.

It is important that funding for these and related programs remain in place in Pennsylvania. The grant money authorized by the legislature and administered by DEP motivates county government to undertake these worthwhile programs. But perhaps most importantly, it leverages considerable investments by the counties themselves, municipalities, computer manufacturers, institutions, and businesses that make or generate electronics.

The Pennsylvania electronics recyclers with us today, Envirocycle and Reclamere, have forged productive partnerships with segments of the computer industry, a number of businesses, counties, and other public and quasi-public entities. The NEPSI dialogue has raised awareness among computer manufacturers and most now recognize that they, too, have an important role in these recycling efforts. After much criticism from the recycling community in the late nineties and the earlier parts of this decade, Dell has stepped up its recycling efforts. The computer giant sponsored recycling events in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia last year and recently awarded a pilot program grant to the Centre County Solid Waste Authority for a special recycling event later this year.

Beyond its continuing financial support through its hazardous waste recycling grants, PROP would also urge the Commonwealth to continue to use its leverage in the market place to encourage both computer recycling and design for recyclability. The Department of General Services has made inroads in this regard and we hope that they can continue to do so in the future.

Like so many parts of our waste management and recycling programs in Pennsylvania, this is a complicated and evolving issue. As always, PROP and its members welcome the opportunity to facilitate the evolution of the best program possible.

*The Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania (PROP) is a 501 (c) (3) organization headquartered in Bellwood, PA. Our address is P.O. Box 25, Bellwood, PA 16617. We can be reached electronically at [prop@proprecycles.org](mailto:prop@proprecycles.org) or on the World Wide Web at [www.proprecycles.org](http://www.proprecycles.org). Our phone number is (814) 742-7777 and our fax number is (814) 742-8838.*