

Electronic recycling

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Electronics have revolutionized our lives. Cell phones, radios and computers all play a crucial role in the daily routines of each student here at UNH, but what most people do not know is that these electronics also play a crucial role in threatening our health and environment.

"Electronics have heavy metals in them," explains Jeff Anderson, the hazardous waste specialist at UNH Environmental Health and Safety. "You don't want to take the chance of leaking the heavy metals into the environment, or let them get into ground water. It's basically polluting the environment."

Computer monitors, printers, televisions, CPU's and printers are just a sample of electronics that have heavy metals such as mercury, lead and cadmium in them. These metals are located in the main circuit board of the piece of electronic. These heavy metals can be extremely hazardous to the environment posing health and landfill problems.

When a faculty or staff member, a university department, or an administrative office realizes that they are no longer in need of their product, they put in what is called a surplus request to the University System of New Hampshire Purchasing and Contract Services.

"First we want to know, does anyone else need this electronic [device]?" says Denise Smith, the director of Purchasing and Contract Services. "Then they go to our website. They let us know that they have a surplus, and we can either advertise it for sale, or some people even like to donate it to non-profit organizations."

If the product is no longer needed, or no longer usable, it is picked up at a requested location and brought back to EHS where it is palletized.

When something is palletized it is placed on a sturdy wooden or plastic platform. In the case of electronic waste, the equipment is segregated onto different pallets then securely stacked so it can be shipped out on a truck, says Marty McCrone, the hazardous waste manager at UNH Environmental and Health Safety.

"We get all sorts of

electronics," Anderson explains. "We have pallets of CPU's, computer monitors, speakers and boxes of keyboards."

Although extremely popular on the UNH campus, computer electronics are not the only products that can be recycled.

"Anything with a circuit board can be recycled," explains McCrone. "Phones, fax machines or even research equipment."

Once the waste is examined, it is separated into three different levels.

"The first level is a complete component," McCrone explains. "This is when it can be reused in a computer, but usually by the time we get it is non-usable. The second level is when we remove the components, and the final level is when the component becomes a secondary material, like plastic or metal."

According to McCrone, UNH is probably the single largest electronic scrap holder in the state of New Hampshire.

"We ship out electronic waste every two months, so about six times a year," explains McCrone. "The waste is shipped out to state permitted recyclers, or EPA's, environmental protection agencies."

Hopping on the electronic recycling wagon is the University of Massachusetts in Lowell. This university is very avid about electronic waste.

"The Environmental Health and Safety department coordinates students who pick up electronics and bring them back to a central location," says Richard Lemoine, the assistant director of Environmental Health and Safety Department. "With shipping the waste stream out every six weeks, we were able to recycle 35.9 tons of electronic waste between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007, and that wasn't including computer monitors."

With flat screen televisions and computer monitors becoming the new thing of today, electronic waste will begin to decrease, along with the hazardous role that it plays in our environment.

"Guess what? Everyone is going to flat screen," McCrone explains. "That means less disposal cost, and way less lead."

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