



Digital TV: E-Waste Tsunami?

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Millions of analog TVs could be obsolete in 2009 when the nation switches to Digital TV. And some advocates are fearful that Americans will simply throw them away, causing immeasurable harm to the environment.

"There's going to be an e-waste tsunami that hits America," John Shegerian, chief executive of Electronic Recyclers in Fresno, California, tells The Los Angeles Times.

On February 17, 2009, the nation will switch from analog to Digital TV signals. At that time, Americans will need a new Digital TV, a digital converter box or a pay TV service to continue to watch television.

While some viewers will connect converter boxes to their old analog sets, millions are expected to simply buy the new digital sets. That would likely lead to mass junking of the analog TVs, which contain lead-encased tubes and other hazardous materials.

"That conversion is going to trigger the reality that even if it's working, even if I turn it on and the screen lights up, this is a device that's incompatible with the current technology," Mark Murray, executive director of Californians Against Waste, tells The Times. "I do think we'll see a wave of new discards."

Lanny Clavecilla, a spokesman for the California Integrated Waste Management Board, says it's unclear how damaging the impact will be.

But consumer electronics firms are aware of the possible danger to the environment and they have set up a web site (mygreenelectronics.org) where Americans can find places to leave their old TVs. The Consumer Electronics Associates reports that 19 percent of Americans now throw their old gadgets in the trash.

Murray tells The Times that he fears that number will rise as the digital transition date gets closer.

"You're going to see people not only going out and buying a new TV and discarding the one in the family room, they're going to discard the one in the basement too," he said. "We don't have to wait for this avalanche to take place in 2009 — it's happening right now."

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