



## Company Takes Lead On E-Waste Recycling

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*What should you be doing with those old computers, cell phones and televisions? Ask ERI.*

By Bruce W. Fraser

Pssst. Here's a little known fact: The gigantic Best Buy billboard in Times Square is made out of recycled waste from a West Coast company, Electronic Recyclers International.

ERI, a private company based in Fresno, Calif., is the largest electronics recycler in the United States, with locations in Massachusetts Maryland, Indiana, Minnesota, Colorado, Texas, California and Washington. As e-waste legislation expands, the company plans to service all 50 states.

ERI was founded by John Shegerian, who has been in the forefront of the U.S. recycling movement. Shegerian, whose slogan, is "Green is Good," a variation of Gordon Gekko's "Greed is Good," says he founded ERI "to remedy the problem that arises from an unintended consequence of the technological revolution and the electronic waste crisis."

E-waste, or discarded electronic equipment, is the fastest-growing solid waste stream in the world, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). E-waste constitutes anything with a cord or battery, from televisions, radios and computers to hairdryers and irons, and even household appliances like washing machines, dishwashers and air conditioners.

The amount gets bigger each year, and as a result, most of the electronic waste in the U.S. either gets illegally shipped overseas or goes to landfills. Both measures are extremely expensive as well as environmentally damaging.

"We're at the same inflection point as we were when I was starting out in the Internet industry," said Shegerian, who founded and sold several companies prior to forming ERI. "We had the big technology shakeout in 2000-2001. The Internet was developed to democratize information. Companies had no business model that could reach profitability. The same thing is happening in the green world today with respect to e-waste."

ERI does about \$50 million yearly in revenue and employees about 400. Its shredder in Fresno processes up to 20,000 pounds of e-waste hourly and its second shredding facility is coming online by the end of the first quarter of 2011. A third shredder is in the works for Indiana.

The company exports no electronic waste, processing obsolete electronics and extracting the copper,

plastics, glass and precious metals they contain. Best Buy and approximately 2,500 other client companies rely on ERI's services.

In 2009, the company signed a long-term contract with LS Nikko, one of the world's largest copper smelters, to undertake an urban mining operation. The Korean company, instead of mining raw copper from the ground, wanted to mine copper from discarded electronics.

"It's more profitable to mine these metals above ground than underground because it saves more energy," says Shegerian, who in turn sells these metals to smelters around the globe. "Urban mining is the now a recognized and legitimate source of mining."

ERI was one of the early founders and supporters of the e-Stewards program at the Basel Action Network (BAN), a nonprofit organization that works against the disproportionate dumping of toxic waste in the world's poorest villages. The fastest-growing toxic waste stream on earth is from computers, mobile phones and other electronics, BAN says. Through its [e-Stewards program](#), BAN certifies electronic recyclers who have committed to environmentally sound standards for disposing of electronic waste.

"Increasingly, along with the carbon footprint, every major enterprise is beginning to realize that there's also a toxic footprint, and needs to take steps to ensure that their own electronic equipment at the end of its life goes only to the most responsible recyclers, and those are the e-Standards certified recyclers," said Jim Puckett, executive director of BAN, who pointed to Shegerian as someone who has helped raise the bar in the recycling movement.

BAN also has an e-Stewards enterprise program for major institutions and corporations that have agreed to make their best effort to only use e-Stewards recyclers. Among the enterprises that have adopted the e-Standard are Samsung of Korea, Bank of America and Wells Fargo.

Meanwhile, e-waste legislation has been tightening. To date, 27 states have passed such legislation, which requires e-waste to be recycled in proportion to how much a firm sells.

In 2008, Shegerian purchased the phone number 1-800-Recycling and the corresponding Web site, 1800recycling.com, services that streamline the recycling process. He launched the website and brand late last year. By calling or visiting the online site, users can select specific recyclable products from a provided list and enter their zip code to access a comprehensive index of appropriate local recycling facilities. Recently, 1800-Recycling also launched a corresponding iPhone application, "My Recycle List."

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