

## Live from CES: Best Practices for Recycling Electronics

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The Consumer Electronics Show isn't intended for consumers, but it certainly deals with stuff they want. And in one panel discussion here at the 2009 CES, a group of concerned individuals talked about the ramifications of all those cell phones, televisions, netbooks, and other



products. In the panel, titled "Recycling Discarded Electronics: Best Practices," a diverse group of manufacturers, recyclers, and political watchdogs discussed plans to better reuse, reduce, and recycle.

The panel featured John Godfrey, vice president of public affairs at electronics giant [Samsung](#), Jason Linell, executive director of the [National Center for Electronics Recycling](#) in West Virginia, John Shegerian, CEO of [Electronics Recyclers International](#), and Jay Van Doren is cofounder of [TechForward](#). Read all my notes from the panel at [PCMag.com](#), or stay tuned after the jump.

John Godfrey, vice president of public affairs at electronics giant Samsung, launched off the discussion, with mention of the recent launch of the [Samsung Recycling Direct program](#), which he called the most comprehensive computer recycling program in America. The program encompasses permanent recycling centers in all 50 states, which take in and help consumers recycle consumer electronics products from any manufacturer (though there may be a nominal fee for non Samsung products).

Samsung has chosen four major recyclers ([Eco International](#), [Sims](#), [CRT Processing](#), and [Jack's Family Recycling Center](#)), which the company believes are among the cleanest and most efficient in the business. But to be sure, Samsung audits these companies twice a year to ensure their efficiency. Godfrey stresses transparency, noting that the company will continually update its site to show how effective the program is. To date, 1.9 million total pounds of waste have been recycled over the past few years.

To balance this perspective, the panel included Jason Linell, executive director of the [National Center for Electronics Recycling](#) in West Virginia. Linell founded the group in '05 to keep track of all 17 state laws on recycling. State laws have different definitions of what products are electronics and which should be recycled, and different requirements about who can or even should participate. All states have some way of paying for these programs, which differ greatly. California has the Advanced Recycling Fee, for

example--a tax at purchase on products to help pay for their eventual recycling. Other states have variations on producer responsibilities.

"We really do have a patchwork of inconsistencies across the states," he points out. Part of the challenge manufacturers face in complying with these varied laws lies in their continued revisions. California, Maine, Maryland, and others have all passed, then later refined, such laws.

"Ewaste is the fastest growing solid waste stream in the world," agreed John Shegerian, CEO of [Electronics Recyclers International](#). "And all this new technology means we'll keep turning over our old products faster than ever before." His business services companies like Best Buy, local governments in California, and even Fortune 100 companies, helping them make a profit from the business of recycling. ERI barcodes products as plastic, metal, and glass in order to track them most effectively, before sell them off to recycling companies, reusing parts, or sending them to smelters.

ERI is a money-making organization, notes Shegerian, pointing out that recycling is a sustainable business--not just a cost center. His group will be recycling 22 million pounds of electronics waste per month by this time next year. Ewaste recycling used to be merely a subset of the scrap metal industry, but now it's a real sustainable business of its own. "The green revolution is past the tipping point," he claims, noting that the company has reserved the domain name [www.1800recycling.com](http://www.1800recycling.com). "We're going to do what Jim McCann, CEO of [1800Flowers.com](http://1800Flowers.com), did for the flower industry."

Most of the panel examined the issue of recycling, but one panelist had a very different perspective. Jay Van Doren is cofounder of [TechForward](#), a group that concerns itself with reuse, in an effort to prevent electronics from ending up at recyclers in the first place. TechForward tries to encourage people to see the whole product lifecycle at the point of purchase. After all, from a green perspective, resale and refurbishing older products is better even than recycling.

To that end, TechForward came up with the Guaranteed Buyback program. Sold through retailers or bundled with a new product, it locks in trading values for a product at the point of purchase, so that you'll know how much your new digital camera will sell for in 6 months, 1 year, or 2 years. This makes it easy for tech enthusiasts who buy a lot of gear to recycle their products.