

Modern Metals

Sustainable metals

Electronic Recyclers International explains how urban mining plays a role in its new partnership

June 2010



If you happen to have an old television or Xbox lying around, John Shegerian thinks of you as a client. In fact, almost everyone is a client for John Shegerian, chairman and CEO of Electronic Recyclers International Inc., Fresno, Calif. As a self-proclaimed e-waste evangelist, he educates people about the benefits of a new e-waste recycling trend: urban mining.

The largest e-waste recycling company in the United States, ERI collects unwanted electronics, including laptops, printers, cell phones, televisions and DVD players. The ERI website states the company recycles more than 170 million pounds of electronics annually, and 100 percent of all material is recycled into three commodities: metals, plastic and glass. None of the collected electronics end up in landfills, and none are exported illegally to other countries.



"Everyone has an e-waste problem ... We get to be a solution," Shegerian says. ERI hosts weekly collection events around the nation and allows people to drop off e-waste at one of six facilities. Its larger clients include Waste Management Inc., Houston; Best Buy, Minneapolis; and The City of Los Angeles. According to Shegerian, plans to open facilities abroad, with the help of ERI's new partner, Korea-based LS-Nikko Copper, are in the works.

Partnership strengthens global presence

"Due to a partnership announced several months ago, LS-Nikko Copper has invested in urban mining, or above-ground mining, as a resource for precious metals," according to a press release. "In

turn, the massive amounts of commodities that go through ERI's electronic waste recycling facilities across the country have a guaranteed home."

With the second-largest smelter in the world, LS-Nikko Copper invested in ERI, recognizing it as the leading brand in recycling electronics in the United States. LS-Nikko Copper also gained a minority-investment position in ERI as part of the agreement, according to the press release.

LS-Nikko Copper will offer ideas, guidance and funding to help ERI achieve its main mission: to become the largest electronic waste recycling company in the world, Shegerian says.

"LS-Nikko Copper has proven their foresight by investing in us and investing in urban mining, and they are the first large smelter in the world to take the position in the new trend of urban mining," Shegerian said in the press release.

Shift toward urban mining

"Urban mining is the act of keeping metals and electronics, which we know contain a massive amount of metals, above ground instead of burying them needlessly in landfills," says Shegerian. "Why should we fill up our landfills with metals and electronics when we could keep them above ground, recycle them, commoditize them in an environmentally friendly and appropriate way ... and get them back directly to the smelters?"

E-waste contains large amounts of rare metals, including platinum, gallium, indium and palladium. Aside from multiple environmental harms associated with tossing metals into landfills, urban mining offers additional benefits.

This process reduces the amount of waste in landfills, provides smelters with the materials to manufacture new products and uses less energy than mining material from below ground. Urban mining can benefit companies and the environment simultaneously.

According to Shegerian, it doesn't matter where the reused material ends up. It could become part of a hospital in India or an iPhone. Regardless, "it's going to be reused appropriately, and that's the essence of sustainability. It's the essence of good recycling," he says.

"It's a win-win-win for everybody."

ERI plans to conquer the world's e-waste recycling crisis by continuing to educate people and develop relationships with companies such as LS-Nikko Copper.

"Our real mission is to become the largest electronic waste recycling company in the entire world, and I say that because we're a solution-based company," Shegerian says. "The problem is electronic waste is the fastest-growing solid waste stream in the world.

"There is a solution and that will help make our environment and our world a better place to be in. So I'm glad to be just one part of that puzzle."

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