



## Recycling of electronic items a 'success story'

By [Wendy Koch](#), USA TODAY

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Tommy Bass accepts an analog TV at the Broward County waste center in Florida last June.

### AN INCREASE IN E-CYCLING

The number of recycled electronic items, and their total weight, more than doubled from 1999 to 2007, the most recent year for which figures are available. However, the percentage of electronics being recycled remained relatively constant.

Source: Environmental Protection Agency

Year	Units recycled (millions)	Tons recycled (thousands)	Percentage recycled
1999	23.6	157	14.9%
2000	24.0	190	14.8%
2001	28.1	210	14.5%
2002	34.5	250	15.3%
2003	40.8	290	14.9%
2004	48.6	320	15.7%
2005	54.3	345	15.9%
2006	61.3	377	17.9%
2007	68.5	414	18.4%

Electronics are being recycled in record numbers as more states require it and more companies collect and even pay for discarded items, but the gains come with controversy.

Some environmentalists complain that recycling is not keeping pace with electronics sales. Some say e-waste is being dumped in developing countries, where toxic materials such as lead and mercury can leach from landfills into groundwater.

"It is a success story, but we'd like to see it get more successful" to keep up with the electronics boom, says Janette Petersen of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The amount of recycled items more than doubled from 1999 to 2007, the most recent year for which the EPA has figures. But as a percentage of all electronics, it increased less, from 15% to 18%.

"The demand for electronics recycling has been growing," partly because of the switch last year to digital TV, says Jennifer Berry of Earth911.com, a private group that keeps a database of recyclers. Last year, she says 31% of inquiries involved electronics, primarily TVs, batteries and computers.

Public and private efforts are expanding:

- Vermont became the 21st state last month to enact a law that requires e-waste recycling.
- Twenty-six companies — including [Dell](#), [Hewlett-Packard](#), AT&T and [Verizon](#)— have partnered with the EPA on the Plug-In to eCycling program to promote electronics recycling since its launch in 2003.

- Companies such as Gazelle.com pay for used gadgets such as iPods, which they resell or recycle.
- Best Buy and other stores are collecting more e-waste. [Target](#) announced last month that it put bins in every store to accept cell phones, MP3 players and ink cartridges.

Jim Puckett of Basel Action Network, a Seattle-based non-profit organization that aims to stop toxic exports, worries that some American companies dump e-waste in China and Africa to save money.

"People are trying to look green, but they're not telling you where it (waste) is going," he says. "You can't turn over your TV to just any recycler." He says it's better to store an old TV than give it to a recycler that may export it to poor countries.

The Basel Action Network announced its e-Stewards program last month to ensure safe handling of electronics by using only recyclers certified by accredited organizations.

It now lists 45 recyclers in 80 locations. [Samsung](#) and other companies have signed on. Environmental groups, including the [Sierra Club](#), back it.

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