

# The Clean Computer Campaign

Working for sustainability, accountability and cleaner production in the high-tech industry



The European Union is also proposing further laws:

- requiring producers to pay the costs of collecting and recycling their discarded products,
- phasing out some metals and flame retardants by 2004,
- mandating that 70% of computer waste must be recycled (incineration cannot be considered recycling).

However, the American Electronics Association (AEA) and the US Trade Representative (USTR) are lobbying against legislation that would make producer responsibility the standard throughout Europe. The USTR and the AEA claim this legislation is a barrier to free trade and that government has no right to ban hazardous materials or make producers pay. Many US computer companies do not want to see take-back laws happen here.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Should computer manufacturers design cleaner computers? Should computers be more upgradeable? Should producers take back their obsolete products for recycling?

**Write or phone your computer manufacturer** asking them to start a take back program. Visit the Clean Computer Campaign at <http://www.svtc.org/cleancc> or <http://www.cccpage.com> for their addresses.

**Write to the US Trade Representative** telling them to stop lobbying against European take-back plans. Contact your local government representatives and others in your community and ask them to get involved. Tell them you want to see take-back legislation here, too. Write to: [cbarshefsky@ustr.gov](mailto:cbarshefsky@ustr.gov). Fax: 202-395-3911.

## IS THERE A SOLUTION? YES! IT'S CALLED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

### ✓ **Producers take back their old computers for re-use and recycling.**

If producers have to pay for handling waste from their old products, municipalities and taxpayers will save money. Requiring producers to pay for the costs will also encourage them to develop and design cleaner products. Altogether, product take-back is a fairer way to pay for the costs of handling the rising mountains of computer waste.

### ✓ **Producers design cleaner computers without using hazardous materials.**

Producers can design cleaner computers. They can make circuit boards and computer housings without flame retardants. They can use lead-free solder and PVC-free cables and plastics that are safe to recycle. Chip makers can use safer chemicals. Designers can create computers that can be repaired and upgraded more easily and cheaply. Many countries in Europe and Asia have already passed laws to make producers responsible for their waste. It is time for us to do the same thing here in the U.S.

## THE U.S. COMPUTER INDUSTRY OPPOSES PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

Already Sweden, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Norway and the Netherlands have passed take-back laws. Computer producers there are already taking back their products and recycling them.

Clean Computer Campaign  
c/o Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition  
760 N. First Street  
San Jose, CA 95112  
USA

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
San Jose, CA  
Permit No. 4908

**Electronics Sustainability Commitment**  
Each new generation of technical improvements in electronics products should include parallel and proportional improvements in environmental, health and safety as well as social justice attributes.  
*adopted by the Trans-Atlantic Network for Clean Production, May 16, 1999*

## JOIN THE CLEAN COMPUTER CAMPAIGN

A growing and imminent waste crisis is about to hit the USA. The source may surprise you: it's the computer sitting on your desk.

Computer junk is growing at an escalating rate throughout the world. Consider that in the USA:

- ◆ More than 12 million computers are scrapped every year. This rate is increasing as computer life spans shrink and more people buy computers.
- ◆ More than 315 million computers will become obsolete during the next four years. This will generate more than 1 billion pounds of lead waste.
- ◆ More than half the households in America now own a computer — and most people don't know what to do with their old computer.

What's worse, your computer contains more than 1,000 materials — and many of them are hazardous. If dumped in landfills, chemicals will leach out, endangering groundwater and putting the health of local communities at risk. If incinerated, they can generate toxic emissions such as dioxins.

Can the computer industry clean up? Can computers be safely recycled? Yes. But only if consumers demand it. Join the Clean Computer Campaign and find out how.\*

### Clean Computer Campaign

For more information and extensive references, visit our website at: [www.svtc.org/cleancc/cccpage.htm](http://www.svtc.org/cleancc/cccpage.htm)

## COMPUTER JUNK IS GROWING

Computer recycling is not working. Fewer than 14 percent of junked computers are recycled or donated for re-use. In 1998, only 6% of computers were recycled compared to the amount sold.

By 2005, one computer will be discarded for every new one put on the market.

It's estimated that more than three-quarters of all computers ever bought in the USA are stored in people's homes and offices because they don't know what to do with them. If everyone threw them out at once, we would have a one mile high waste mountain of junked computers the size of a football field.

Y2K concerns this year are causing even more computer junking. Many schools and businesses are buying new equipment in response to media hype about anticipated computer malfunctions as we approach the year 2000. Many believe it is easier and cheaper to buy new equipment rather than test or fix their older equipment for Y2K readiness.



One of the growing piles of computer waste. (Photo courtesy of Recycling Council of Ontario)

## HAZARDOUS MATERIALS IN YOUR COMPUTER

Computers should really be considered chemical waste products. They contain hazardous materials such as lead, cadmium, mercury, brominated flame retardants, and over 1,000 other materials.

Up to 5 pounds of **lead** can be found in a typical computer monitor. Lead is also used as solder for printed circuit boards. **Cadmium** is found in printed circuit boards, in plastics, and in older monitors. **Mercury** is found in switches and printed circuit boards. **PVC plastic** is used in cabling and computer housings. **Brominated flame retardants** are mixed into plastics.

The computer industry markets new products so quickly that it is impossible for government health agencies to keep pace with adequate testing for environmental or human health effects.

A recent study found computer dismantlers had 70 times the level of brominated flame retardants in their blood compared to non-exposed people. **Even computer users had slightly elevated blood levels.** The chemicals attach to dust particles which come from the plastic. These chemicals can cause nervous disorders and cancer and are particularly dangerous in pregnant women because of their effect on the developing child. We can and must do better!

### How much waste is in 315 million computers?

Plastic	4 billion pounds
Lead	1 billion pounds
Cadmium	1.9 million pounds
Chromium	1.2 million pounds
Mercury	400,000 pounds

## JOIN US!

The Clean Computer Campaign is building a campaign to insist that producers in North America take back their products and design them for recycling, re-use and community and worker safety. We need your help to be successful. PLEASE JOIN US!

- Yes, I want to be a part of the Clean Computer Campaign!
- Put me on your mailing list Sign me up for your list serve (*please provide e-mail*).
- You can use my/my organization's name to show the growing support for this important campaign.

Visit us at [www.svtc.org/cleancc/cccpage.htm](http://www.svtc.org/cleancc/cccpage.htm)  
Write us at 760 N. First Street, San Jose, CA 95112 or by e-mail at [svtc@igc.org](mailto:svtc@igc.org)  
Phone: 408-287-6707, Fax: 408-287-6771

Name

Organization

Address

City

State  Zip

Phone

Fax

E-mail