

CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION TOXICITY OF COMPUTERS AND ELECTRONICS WASTE

Resolution 113-03

Author: Robert M. Gould, MD

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Whereas, the manufacture, use and disposal of electronic products has a broad range of environmental and health impacts including the use of carcinogenic materials, toxic chemicals, air and groundwater pollution, poor working conditions and ozone depletion 1; and

Whereas, due to the higher sales and shorter life spans of electronic products, electronic waste has become the world's fastest growing waste stream and the National Safety Council predicts that in the U.S. between 315 million and 680 million computers will become obsolete within the next few years 2. In California alone, 6,000 computers become obsolete everyday 3; and

Whereas, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, 70% of the heavy metals (including mercury and cadmium) found in landfills comes from discarded electronic products. These heavy metals and other hazardous substances found in electronics contaminate groundwater and pose other environmental and public health risks 4; and Whereas, electronic waste contains significant amounts of PVC, which makes the flue gas residues and air emissions particularly dangerous to human health 5; and

Whereas, at present, brand owners, producers, and original equipment manufacturers bear none of the burden or responsibility for safely managing discarded electronic equipment at the end of its useful life, instead burdening taxpayers, local governments and end users with these costs and responsibilities; and

Whereas, in the European Union and several Asian nations, brand owners, producers and original equipment manufacturers bear financial responsibility for ensuring the environmentally superior management of discarded and obsolete electronic equipment and for phasing out toxic materials such as lead, mercury, and brominated flame retardants; and

Whereas, the health care industry increasingly relies on and uses electronic products in all facets of operation; and Whereas, electronic manufacturers can take back their products at the end of life to safely reuse, and recycle the components and redesign products with minimal use of harmful materials; therefore be it

RESOLVED: That CMA encourages its members and California health institutions to adopt purchasing or leasing contracts only with electronics manufacturers who are committed to safely handling the products at the end of life, meaning that they reuse and recycle to the greatest extent possible, do not export hazardous electronic waste to developing countries, and safely dispose of the waste that can not be reused or recycled; and be it further

RESOLVED: That CMA encourages its members and California health institutions to provide purchasing/ leasing preferences to electronics manufacturers that minimize the use of toxic and hazardous constituents, use recycled content, and design products that can be easily recycled in order to minimize the adverse public health impacts from electronic waste; and be it further

RESOLVED: That CMA support policies that hold electronics manufacturers responsible for taking back their products at the end of life, with the objective of re-designing their products for longevity and reduction of harmful materials; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the CMA refer this issue for national action.

References

1 "Policy Frameworks to Stimulate Environmental Technology in the Computer and Electronics Sector", World Resources Institute, September, 1998. Pg. 21.

2 National Safety Council, Electronic Product Recovery and Recycling Baseline Report, Washington DC.

3 Californians Against Waste, "Addressing the Environmental and Economic Costs of Obsolete Electronics (E-Scrap) in California."

4 "Computers, E-Waste, and Product Stewardship: Is California Ready for the Challenge," May 11, 2001, Report for the US Environmental Protection Agency, Region IX, pg. 13.

5 Environmental Aspects of PVC (Copenhagen, 1996), Danish Environmental Protection Agency