

## More states ban disposal of electronics in landfills

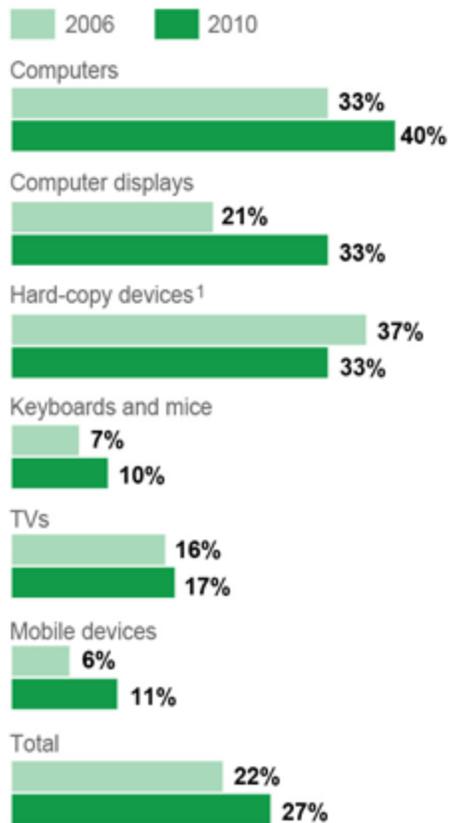
By Wendy Koch, USA TODAY

Want a sleek tablet or a fax-scanner-printer for Christmas? As you part with the old stuff, be aware that more states have made it illegal this year to simply throw away computers, printers and TVs.

Seventeen states have banned electronic waste from landfills, requiring it to be recycled so its toxic materials don't leach into groundwater. Seven of these bans took effect this year, and two more will take effect soon: Illinois in January 2012 and Pennsylvania in January 2013.

### Recycling electronics

The percentage of various electronics that get recycled each year:



1 – Hard-copy devices include printers, faxes, scanners, digital copiers and multifunction devices.

Source: Environmental Protection Agency, 2010 figures are projected.

By Janet Loehrke, USA TODAY

"The disposal bans are starting to kick in," says Barbara Kyle of the Electronics TakeBack Coalition, which promotes recycling. She says most are part of broader e-waste laws that increase recycling options.

"Are there green police? Not really," Kyle says, adding states aren't enforcing the bans by checking a household's garbage. Rather, she says the goal is to educate the public. "This stuff definitely does not belong in the trash."

Electronics can contain lead, mercury, cadmium and other potentially harmful chemicals, but only 25% of discarded devices (by weight) was recycled in 2009, the most recent year for which the Environmental Protection Agency has final data.

States are enacting bans because they don't see voluntary programs as effective as mandates, says Scott Cassel of the Product Stewardship Institute. He says the bans prompted a boom in recycling programs.

Yet the patchwork of state laws "creates challenges for manufacturers and retailers," says Walter Acorn of the Consumer Electronics Association, an industry group. "We'd prefer a national model," he says.

Twenty-five states have passed e-waste recycling laws, 15 of which include disposal bans. Massachusetts and New Hampshire have independent bans.

When Minnesota first banned e-waste from landfills in 2006, local governments reported a surge in illegal dumping, says Garth Hickle of the state's Pollution Control Agency.

"You'd come across a TV sitting in an alley," he says. As recycling options expanded, he says, the problem has gone away.

Officials from states where the ban took effect this year — Connecticut, Indiana, New Jersey, New York (for businesses), North Carolina, South Carolina and Vermont — say they've tried to prepare residents.

In North Carolina, e-waste recycling has more than doubled in the last year, even though the state is not fining violators, says Scott Mouw, state recycling director. He adds, "Encouragement is working better than enforcement."