New York's e-waste law boosts recycling, lowers costs, report finds

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By Catherine Kavanaugh

New York's e-waste law has increased recycling and lowered costs for municipalities.

Easier consumer access to scrap electronics collection sites has contributed to an increase in e-waste recycling and a decrease in government spending in New York State, according to a new report by the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

Still, there are challenges to overcome, according to the evaluation of the state's electronic producer responsibility law.

The law was implemented on April 1, 2011. In its first eight months, the state saw the number of electronics take-back sites increase by 77% and collect more than 44 million pounds of scrap electronics.

The law helps prevent the release of hazardous substances and it saved local governments millions, if not tens of millions, of dollars, by shifting the financial burden of post-consumer product management away from municipalities and toward producers, the report said.

The increase in electronics recycling has helped New York's e-waste recyclers grow, and brought new recyclers into the New York market, creating jobs and adding to the state's tax base, according to Andrew Radin, chair of the New York Product Stewardship Council (NYFSC).

"At the same time, municipalities have experienced significant cost savings by accessing free recycling through manufacturer programs, and by avoiding disposal costs," Radin said in a statement.

However, the law has not been an electronics waste panacea, according to the report. There is still too little public awareness about take-back initiatives and too few convenient collection sites, which leads to lower product recovery rates.
Also, the report cites serious inefficiencies in statewide and national recycling markets for cathode ray tubes in older monitors and TVs. This adversely affects the economics for responsible e-waste recyclers.

Scott Cassel, CEO of PSI, is calling for more dialogue between government, non-government organizations, recyclers, retailers, and manufacturers to find a comprehensive solution.

"While New York's e-waste collection program, which was established by the law, has had a net positive impact on electronics recycling in the state, there are still some fairly large kinks that need to be ironed out to optimize the system," Cassel said in a statement.

The report offers a number of recommendations to strengthen the electronics waste take-back and recycling program. The recommendations urge the state to fund proper oversight of the program; the state to require all recyclers be third-party certified to ensure responsible handling; manufacturers to promote the program more; and the state to maintain a ban on disposing of CRT displays to support reclamation.

To view the entire report, click here.

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