

PSI finds room for improvement in implementation of New York e-scrap law

By Editorial Staff, Resource Recycling

A recent third-party assessment of New York state's two-year-old e-scrap collection law has found that while the legislation has boosted collection rates of used electronics and lowered costs for municipalities, it's also been bogged down in two important areas: data analysis and consumer education.

The [evaluation](#), conducted by the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) on behalf of the Natural Resource Defense Council, states that a complete assessment of the Electronic Equipment Reuse and Recycling Act has been hindered by the fact that New York's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has yet to release vital figures collected from recycling companies, manufacturers and other e-scrap stakeholders. The DEC, the report points out, was scheduled to release a report by April of last year.

"DEC officials interviewed for this report said that a staff shortage has contributed to the delay in data compilation and reporting," the PSI assessment reads. "Public disclosure of collection data is needed to gauge program success and identify challenges."

Still, even without having hard DEC numbers on hand, PSI was able to develop a number of conclusions about the New York law, which went into effect April 1, 2011, and aimed to create a competitive market for used electronics by requiring manufacturers to collect — or get credit for collecting — a certain amount of e-scrap.

The report found, for instance, that based on interviews with recycling companies and local governments, the volume of scrap electronics collected in New York has increased substantially, thanks in large part to the fact that the number of collection sites increased by 77 percent in the program's first year.

In addition, by requiring electronics manufacturers to fund and facilitate collection programs (which they have tended to do by contracting work out), the law has drastically reduced the cost of collection for individual towns, cities and counties. "Exact savings are difficult to pinpoint due to lack of baseline data," the PSI study states, "but anecdotal evidence shows municipal cost savings in the millions, if not tens of millions, of dollars, enabling municipalities to shift their resources to provide other needed services."

Though collection has increased, researchers pointed out that the manufacturers and governments have room for improvement when it comes to informing consumers about the specifics of e-scrap recycling. "Stakeholders report that New York residents are not well informed about where and how to recycle their electronics. While online resources like the [greenergadgets.org](#) website are available, they are not well known."

Other rough patches administrators have hit as they've tried to implement the law include:

- Creating a strong e-scrap collection system in New York City, where awareness remains low and where collection sites remain inconvenient to many residents.
- Effectively dealing with cathode ray tube displays, which are acting as a burden to recycling operations because the market for the processed material has significantly decreased as computer and TV technology has shifted.



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