

National Waste Reporting 2013

FACTSHEET – NATIONAL TELEVISION AND COMPUTER RECYCLING SCHEME

What is e-waste?

Electronic waste (or e-waste) describes unwanted or discarded electrical equipment. This includes waste televisions, telecommunications and IT equipment, as well as small and large household appliances.

The electrical and electronics industry is one of the world's fastest growing manufacturing sectors. As a result of this rise in production, as well as the increasing rate of product obsolescence, waste from electrical and electronic equipment, or e-waste, has become the fastest growing waste stream in the post industrialised world, leading to serious environmental and health problems, attracting growing public interest.

Why is it a problem?

Electrical and electronic products, in particular televisions and computers, constitute a significant and growing proportion of Australia's waste to landfill. E-waste can contain hazardous substances such as lead, bromine, cadmium, arsenic and mercury, which can be harmful for the environment and for human health if not managed properly. These types of products can also contain valuable non-renewable materials that can be recovered, such as glass, metals, plastics, as well as precious metals such as gold.

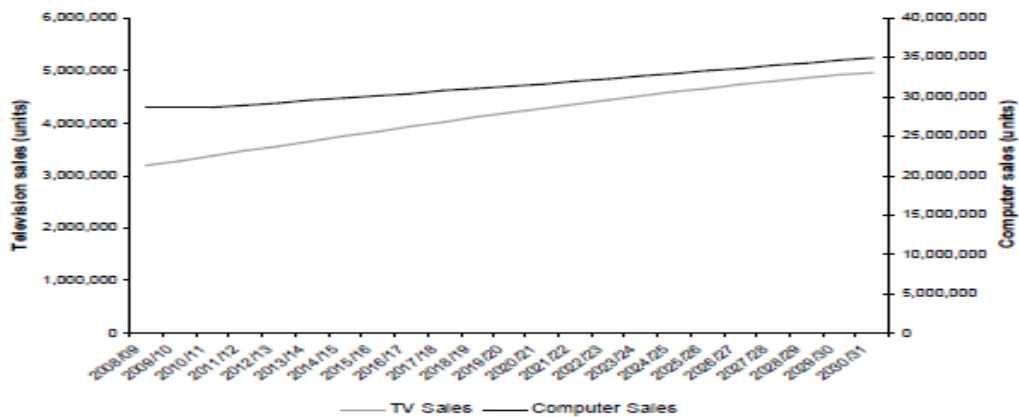
Internationally, programs have been developed to reduce the environmental impacts of e-waste. The European Union, Japan, Canada, and a number of US states have introduced legislation requiring the recovery and recycling of televisions, computers, and other electronic products.

How big is the problem?

E-waste volumes are increasing, with shorter life spans of product and increasing ownership of electrical products. In 2010 it was estimated that only around 17% of television and computer waste was recycled, with the remainder stockpiled or sent to landfill.

In 2011–12, over 15 million televisions, computers, monitors and printers were imported into Australia, along with over 22 million computer parts and peripherals (such as scanners, webcams, mice and keyboards). In total, an estimated 140 000 tonnes of these products were brought into Australia, around 6kg for every Australian.

Figure 1 Australia, television and computer sales 2007-08 to 2030-31 (projected)¹



The e-waste solution

In 2002 environment ministers agreed that national action was required in relation to waste electrical and electronic equipment. On behalf of the EPHC, a multi-jurisdictional working group examined the issue of waste electrical and electronic equipment. Televisions and computers were identified as priorities for action, as these products made up a significant part of the e-waste stream, had low recycling rates and contained relatively high levels of hazardous materials.

In 2009, following several years consultation with industry, government and community stakeholders and consideration of a Regulation Impact Statement (RIS), Australian environment ministers agreed that televisions and computers would be the first products to be regulated under the Australian Government’s landmark *Product Stewardship Act 2011*.

National Television and Computers Recycling Scheme

The Product Stewardship (Televisions and Computers) Regulations 2011 commenced on 8 November 2011, supporting a co-regulatory National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme (the scheme). The Scheme requires importers and manufacturers of televisions and computers to join and fund government-approved, industry-run co-regulatory arrangements, which are then able to collect and recycle products on their behalf. There are over 660 collection points across Australia, which can be viewed in the interactive mapping tool.

The scheme sets an annual recycling target, based on the total television and computer waste generated in a given year. This target progressively increases from 30 per cent in the first target year of 2012–13 to 80 per cent in 2021–22. Industry is also required to provide recycling services across Australia that accept televisions and computer products for recycling, free of charge for householders and small businesses. Recycling services may include take-back events, or permanent drop off points. 97 per cent of Australians will have access to a Scheme recycling service by the end of 2013.

Results from the first year of the National Television and Computers Recycling Scheme will be available shortly.

To ensure there are robust frameworks to support sound environment and health and safety outcomes under the Scheme, the Australian Government has sponsored the development of

¹ <http://www.scew.gov.au/system/files/resources/0c513e54-d968-ac04-758b-3b7613af0d07/files/ps-tv-comp-decision-ris-televisions-and-computers-200911-0.pdf>

an Australian and New Zealand Standard and guidance material for industry on the safe handling and processing of e-waste. The *AS/NZS for collection, storage, transport and treatment of electrical and electronic waste* was endorsed by the Standards Australia Technical Committee and published in 2013.

Australian jurisdictions have also taken direct action on television and computer waste. The ACT became the first jurisdiction to ban all computers and televisions units from landfill by introducing mandatory recycling for televisions in 2010, complementing the mandatory recycling for computers introduced in 2005. The South Australian Government also banned all televisions and computers from landfill in 2013.