



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Ash Kalra

SUBJECT: E-STEWARDS CERTIFICATION

DATE: May 27, 2010

Approved

Date 5/27/2010

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to draft language and provide analysis for the following recommendations:

- (a) That all City of San José sponsored e-waste recycling is done by e-Stewards Certified providers as defined by the Basel Action Network.
- (b) That all e-waste recyclers operating in the City of San José become e-Stewards Certified.
- (c) Require the City of San José to become an e-Stewards Enterprise, committing to best efforts to exclusively use e-Stewards recyclers.
- (d) Allow for a reasonable grace period as recommended by staff to allow for e-waste recyclers to come into compliance to any new city requirements.

BACKGROUND

The dumping and improper disposal of electronic waste, most commonly referred to as e-waste, has become a growing problem for communities worldwide, as well as for the global ecosystem. E-waste is the fastest-growing component of municipal waste streams, thus, it is important for us to look into becoming an enterprise for responsible recycling. E-waste includes common modern life products, such as televisions, computers, laptops, and cell phones, but it also contains hazardous toxic chemicals. Computers, for example, contain lead, cadmium, mercury, chromium, and polyvinyl chlorides – all of these materials have known effects on human health that range from brain and kidney damage to cancer.

In addition to the health hazards e-waste can cause when not properly disposed, there are problems with the distribution of e-waste by some recyclers. A small percentage of e-waste is estimated to be sent to recyclers. In the U.S. alone, as little as 11% - 14% of e-waste is sent to recyclers. The remainder is often dumped or burned, either formally in landfills and incinerators, or improperly dumped or burned. As a result of this lack of responsible recycling, our soil, water, and air are easily contaminated. In addition, an estimated 70-80% of the e-waste sent to recyclers

is exported to less developed countries. In countries like these, primitive technologies such as open air burning and riverside acid baths are used to extract a few materials. The remaining toxic materials are then typically dumped. Therefore, not only does it defeat the purpose of responsibly attempting to recycle e-waste materials, but it also renders the local populations where this unregulated processing occurs to generations of disease and premature death. We can do better and now there is a way.

In April 2010, the Basel Action Network (BAN), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, formally launched the e-Stewards Certification program to ensure that organizations/individuals who dispose of old electronic equipment can easily identify and use recyclers who adhere to the highest standard of environmental responsibility and worker protection. Certified e-Stewards recyclers are required to adhere to the e-Stewards Standard for Responsible Recycling and Reuse of Electronic Equipment®, written by the environmental community with leaders in the industry. The standards ensure that recyclers are certified by accredited, independent and specially trained e-Stewards certification bodies through on-site audits at least once a year.

There are *Four Core Elements* that make the e-Stewards Certification an accredited program:

1. A specific standard that has value in the marketplace.
2. Multiple independent (third party) certification bodies who hire and oversee auditors qualified to audit to a specific standard, in order to provide a high level of confidence that a business operates in accordance with that standard.
3. An independent accreditation body(s) that is responsible for defining responsibilities for the certification bodies and oversees their work certifying to a particular standard.
4. Ownership of the standard, at a minimum, in order to interpret and maintain it. Some programs have additional oversight of the entire certification program, in order to protect the on-going integrity of certifications.

Prior to launching the e-Stewards Certification program, there had been a process in place by which recyclers could pledge that they would make an effort to come into compliance with certification requirements. While the pledge program was in effect, our Environmental Services Department had encouraged all recyclers the City of San José worked with to sign the pledge. This is no surprise since ESD has consistently shown the willingness to make a sincere effort to ensure our city is leading the way in how we approach significant global environmental issues. Now that the pledge program has expired, the next responsible step is to ensure that we formalize what has been an informal rule that our city has been following by creating a policy to ensure the responsible handling of e-waste materials. In communicating with ESD, the department has expressed support with this move and I look forward to staff's analysis as to how we can best achieve an efficient system to ensure our local providers are e-Stewards certified. Of course, since a 3rd party would be monitoring the operators and administering any required fees, there should be no cost to the city. The only administrative burden would be to require that e-waste recyclers have received certification or are in the process of acquiring it to the satisfaction of ESD staff.

With a commitment to ensure all e-waste recycled in the City of San José is responsibly accounted for, residents can feel confident that their efforts to recycle harmful material responsibly is not being done in vain. Not only will we have confidence that we are encouraging healthful, responsible recycling, but we can be assured that we are not passing on our harmful waste on to other communities for our convenience. Many community and environmental organizations, such as People Acting in Community Together, have taken on the task of educating the community on the importance of thinking about global impacts of local action,

particularly as it relates to e-waste, and I thank them for that effort. As the Capital of Silicon Valley, we need to set a standard for the rest of the country and the world. This is one more example of how we can do that in the realm of environmental stewardship.