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Matthew Gonzalez unloaded a microwave to be recycled at Asset Recovery in St. Paul on Wednesday. The drop-off site charges people to dispose of their electronics.

Easing the way for electronics recycling

• Supporters hope an e-waste recycling measure — expected to be signed into law by Gov. Pawlenty — will cut down on the dumping of unwanted TVs and more.

By NORMAN DRAPER
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Minnesotans will soon find it easier to dispose of old, unwanted television sets and computer monitors, under legislation that won final approval Wednesday and now heads to Gov. Tim Pawlenty, who is expected to sign it.

The measure will be one of the strongest in the nation aimed at recycling electronics, which are loaded with toxic minerals.

Supporters say the measure will reduce the numbers of TV sets and computers that are left by the road,

tossed into woods and lakes, or even burned. They also say the need for easy recycling of TVs will grow in the next couple of years as people make the changeover from analog technology to digital.

The bill, approved in the House on Wednesday after earlier passage in the Senate, makes Minnesota unique for recycling such “e-waste” for two reasons: It requires manufacturers to ratchet up recycling of their electronic products and to pay for those efforts based on the weight of all the TVs and computers they sell in the state.

E-waste continues: Measure applies only to home electronics. **A10** ▶



Daniel Hernandez and Juan Carlos shrink-wrapped a stack of TVs delivered to Asset Recovery. A consumer might pay \$17 to \$22 to dispose of a 19-inch TV.



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Arthur Williams rolled a crate of computers to an area to organize them for recycling at Asset Recovery in St. Paul.

Electronics recycling to get easier

◀ E-WASTE FROM A1

Companies that don't meet their recycling targets would be assessed penalty fees.

"It's important because of the sheer mass of waste that's out there," said Sara Rummel, political coordinator for Clean Water Action Alliance of Minnesota. "You have the backlog of stuff people are keeping in basements, garages and closets because they don't know what to do with it."

It's illegal to dump such electronics in landfills, few garbage collectors will pick them up curbside, and recyclers often charge fees.

The bill affects home, not commercial, electronics.

With the switchover to the improved digital technology,

« IT'S IMPORTANT BECAUSE OF THE SHEER MASS OF WASTE THAT'S OUT THERE. »

Sara Rummel of Clean Water Action Alliance of Minnesota

Rummel said, "we expect to see a tidal wave of TVs to be recycled at that time."

Pay to recycle

Joe Gourki had to pay Wednesday to recycle his laptop. It cost him \$2.10 at Asset Recovery in St. Paul.

"Not too bad," Gourki said. "Last time it was \$10."

Like many drop-off sites around the state, Asset Recovery charges consumers to dispose of their electronic waste. At 35 cents a pound, a 19-inch TV might cost a consumer \$17 to \$22. A medium-sized computer monitor runs about \$10.

Asset Recovery offers "end-of-life" solutions to the electronic waste created by some of the nation's largest corporations and coordinates drop-off programs with counties and other municipalities in Minnesota.

Marshall Johnson, an executive with Asset Recovery, said that he didn't know how the new measure would affect business, but that it is the logical next step after legislators made it illegal to dump

TVs and computer monitors in landfills after July 1, 2006.

"Minnesotans want to do the right thing," said Johnson, who told of hosting a drop-off event in Coon Rapids in February.

"It was 30 below outside and we didn't think anybody would show up. But we had thousands of pounds of TVs and computers dropped off that day."

Other states watching

Only four other states — California, Maryland, Maine and Washington — have enacted e-waste control laws. Others are waiting in the wings.

"There are a number of other states looking at our model very closely," said Rep. Brietta Sailer, DFL-Park Rapids, and the House bill's chief author. "They have been watching what has been happening here."

The bill passed the House on a 114-16 vote. The companion Senate measure was authored by Sen. Linda Higgins, DFL-Minneapolis.

Sailer said 160 manufacturers would be affected by the bill. That includes companies such as Hewlett-Packard and Dell, and also retailers such as Target and Best Buy, which contract with manufacturers to produce their own brands of electronics.

Under the bill's provisions, manufacturers would be responsible for recycling 60 percent of the weight of the products sold the previous year. That would rise to 80 percent beginning in the second year that the measure is in effect.

Manufacturers could either set up their own recycling programs or contract with cities and counties to expand or set up e-waste recycling programs. The manufacturers, whose sales would be reported by retailers, would also have to pay an initial fee of \$5,000, and annual fees of \$2,500 after that.

Richfield-based Best Buy has been offering voluntary recycling programs since 2000, but as a manufacturer of five private label brands, including Insignia televisions, the new measure and its additional costs may require the company to figure out ways to keep prices down, said company spokeswoman Kelly Groehler.

Target officials could not be reached for comment.

It's the metals

Supporters of the bill note that electronics owners are often stymied in their efforts to recycle their old TVs and computers, either because there's no place to take them or because of the recycling fees.

The result is unwanted TVs and computers dumped or even burned, said Annalee Garletz, policy analyst with the Association of Minnesota Counties.

Garth Hickle, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency product-stewardship team leader, estimated that thousands of such electronics are disposed in Minnesota in this way.

The problem is that they contain cathode ray tubes, which, in turn, contain metals such as lead, mercury and cadmium. Rummel said that, dumped into landfills, those metals could leach into groundwater and pollute it.

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