



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The purpose of this review was to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has information of sufficient quality to assess the adequacy of its electronic waste (E-waste) management and the effectiveness of its enforcement policies, to assure that public health is protected. E-waste is the fastest growing domestic waste stream. It includes devices such as computers, televisions, and cell phones. E-waste contains toxic materials that pose hazards to human health and the environment if not properly disposed or recycled. E-waste also contains valuable materials. EPA encourages reuse and recycling of electronics over land-filling and incineration. To that end, EPA manages E-waste via federal regulations, voluntary partnership programs, and support of third-party recycler certification programs.

This report addresses the following EPA's Goals or Cross-Cutting Strategies

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*
- *Enforcing environmental laws.*

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Affairs at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130621-13-P-0298.pdf

Improved Information Could Better Enable EPA to Manage Electronic Waste and Enforce Regulations

What We Found

EPA does not have adequate information to ensure effective E-waste management and enforcement to protect public health and conserve valuable resources. For example, EPA manages E-waste without a consistent approach for defining E-waste. This hampers EPA's ability to effectively collect relevant information and set goals. Further, EPA lacks complete information on E-waste disposition, which hinders the effective use of its resources.

EPA enforcement is hampered by the lack of complete information on cathode ray tube (CRT) exporters in the United States. This incomplete information hinders EPA's ability to set enforcement targets for the CRT Rule. EPA also does not have a practical process to determine the hazardous nature of non-CRT waste. Potentially toxic E-waste could be disposed in municipal landfills or incinerated without potential hazards being identified as required. Further, EPA advocates certified E-waste recyclers but has limited knowledge of the extent of compliance by certified recyclers with federal environmental regulations. In addition, EPA staff stated that E-waste management and enforcement are hampered by federal information collection restrictions and a lack of resources.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that EPA: (1) develop a consistent approach for defining E-waste and identifying information to manage the E-waste universe; (2) develop a practical process to address hazards of non-CRT E-waste that ensures that this waste is managed in an environmentally sustainable manner; (3) evaluate implementation of the certification programs for used electronics; (4) evaluate resource needs for E-waste management; (5) evaluate methods for gathering the information needed to set CRT Rule enforcement targets such as the use of Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Section 3007 information request letters to identify CRT exporters.

EPA concurred with all recommendations, but we consider these recommendations unresolved pending receipt of planned corrective actions and completion dates.

Noteworthy Achievements

EPA helped create the Responsible Recycling Practices certification body and created voluntary E-waste programs. EPA amended the CRT Rule to better track E-waste, and inspected facilities identified by the U.S. Government Accountability Office as "willing to violate" the CRT Rule. EPA also participated in the task force that released the National Strategy for Electronics Stewardship in July 2011.