Reducing Waste at Record-Setting Rates

Source: cta.tech

Published: September 13, 2016

We are purchasing and enjoying technology at unprecedented levels, and emerging trends such as the Internet of Things and wearables likely mean more tech devices will soon be entering our homes.

But what happens once these products are used, and often reused, to their potential and become waste? To help reduce the clutter, the consumer technology (CT) industry has been hard at work minimizing e-waste through innovation and efforts to make recycling old tech devices as easy as purchasing new ones. By building smaller and more efficient products, using smarter materials and creating easier ways for consumers to recycle their used electronics, the tech industry has reduced its environmental footprint in several meaningful ways.

A record-setting 700 million pounds of consumer electronics were recycled in 2015 through the eCycling Leadership Initiative (ELI). Spearheaded by CTA in 2011, the initiative involves collaboration among manufacturers, retailers, collectors, recyclers, non-governmental organizations and government at all levels. The initiative's key goals focus on increasing the number of collection opportunities available to consumers, improving consumer awareness of industry-sponsored recycling facilities and providing transparent metrics on ecycling efforts.

This year's total was the fifth consecutive increase in annual pounds recycled, up 40 million pounds from 2014 (660 million) and more than double the amount recycled at the initiative's inception (300 million). Much of the success has been due to ELI participants' leadership in responsible recycling, with companies like Dell, Samsung, Apple, Best Buy and DirecTV recognized as Initiative Leaders in the report.

Innovations within the CT industry are also helping reduce its environmental impact. By creating products that use lighter and fewer materials (i.e. thinner TVs, smaller phones), the consumer technology category has become the fastest diminishing waste stream in the U.S. This form of materials management, known as source reduction, is the preferred strategy for reducing waste according to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Waste Management Hierarchy.

These milestones help demonstrate the industry's effectiveness at increasing sustainability, explains Walter Alcorn, vice president of environmental affairs and industry sustainability, CTA. "Part of the proof the environmental footprint of the CT industry is shrinking is products are becoming lighter, less material-intensive and more energy efficient, resulting in CT becoming the fastest-declining portion of the country's solid waste stream. And under the eCycling Leadership Initiative, we are further reducing e-waste by providing consumers the ability to properly recycle it."

In addition to recycling, many devices can be reused by a second or even third owner. Giving a consumer technology product another chance at life not only keeps it out of the waste stream, but also conserves more resources than breaking it into component parts for recycling. Today, major retailers provide more than 10,000 buyback and trade-in locations nationwide.

The success of industry initiatives like the ELI shows the importance of a holistic approach to recycling in order to keep it on the right, sustainable path.

Reducing its impact on the environment is one of the consumer tech industry's top priorities. For more information on industry-led sustainability efforts like the eCycling Leadership Initiative, visit CTA.tech/green. And to find tips on living and buying green, as well as to locate the recycling facility nearest you, go to GreenerGadgets.org.