

Profitable, in-house 'green' disposal

By DANI MOLNAR | The Municipal

IT DOESN'T HAPPEN EVERY TIME, but occasionally, going green can also mean saving money. The State Electronics Challenge was designed by the Northeast Recycling Council in Brattleboro, Vt., as a way to teach municipal leaders green electronic disposal techniques. Since 2007, 117 agencies in 36 states have become involved with the program, learning to recycle, buy green and preserve resources.

The program is designed to parallel the lifespan of a piece of equipment from purchase to usage and eventual disposal. Users are taught green methodology at each step.

"One of the purposes of the challenge is to help educate state, local and regional governments about the impact of products and give them guidance on what they can do to reduce their environmental footprint," said Patty Dillon, program manager for the SEC.

As a partner, municipal leaders are offered services, information and webinars, which teach them the techniques. While much of the information is available through the website, technical support, sustainability reports and recognition awards are only provided to those who choose to partner.

Any entity that falls under a state, regional or local government can participate in the challenge, including schools, utility crews and county officials. Partnership is completely free, and there are no repercussions if that participation later ceases.

Partners begin by learning about the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool and how to buy green products. The second phase teaches energy usage and preservation.

"While on your desktop and in your office, it means managing to reduce the footprint," said Dillon.

Paige Taylor, public service administrator for Atlantic Beach, N.C., explained that Atlantic Beach chose to learn to use the Laserfiche system of digital content management to reduce paper use and time in the office. Town employees also learned to print double-sided when they did have to print documents, reducing paper, ink and toner usage, saving them money and resources.

"Those little things add up," she said. "All of that results in savings to the town, which results in savings to the tax payers."

For Taylor, the final end-of-life phase was the most confusing.

"I ran into a brick wall with the TVs, trying to get someone to take them. You think it's going to be easy: All I have to do is go to Best Buy or Circuit City because they're certified. ▶



After two years of practice, employees of Atlantic Beach, N.C., have the protocols for recycling and buying green down. Recently, the town clerk's printer went bad and employees used EPEAT comprehensive environmental ratings to purchase a new one through a register recycler. The photo shows Richard Lee hauling the old printer off to recycling. (Photo provided)

"It feels like I'm being a good steward of the Earth. Even if I don't win an award at least I feel like I've done my best for the town, for the community and for the Earth." —Paige Taylor, public service administrator, Atlantic Beach, N.C.



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“Without this program, we wouldn’t know where to recycle them and the municipality would be stuck with 30 TVs.”


You’ve just got them sitting town-wide throughout the streets so you send the town (claw machine) to pick them up. Then they don’t take them because the cords are gone!”

Taylor’s frustrations aren’t unique. Since landfills won’t accept many electronics, garbage trucks don’t pick them up. Residents leave them sitting alongside the road so the town can deal with them, and like many officials, Taylor didn’t know what to do with them. That’s where her partnership with the State Electronics Challenge came into play.

“They teach us how to dispose of products like TVs, computers, even light bulbs,” she said. “You’d think you could just throw them away and that’s not the case. Through our partnership, I was able to locate responsible certified recyclers. Without this program, we wouldn’t know where to recycle them and the municipality would be stuck with 30 TVs.”

The State Electronics Challenge has been an eye opener for Taylor and other officials in more ways than one. Residents have also noted the town’s new approach and gotten involved. Recently, a local teen partnered with Ace Hardware for another green project because of the example set by the town. For his Eagle Scout Project, Walker Whitley placed recycling filaments throughout fishing areas and around town to help protect sea life.

“We were looking for a program that we could implement to make a difference in our community so that was kind of a big deal,” Whitley said.

At the end of each year, the SEC offers customized annual reports to show each partner how their green efforts have helped the community and offer awards to those who follow through on one, two or all three phases of the green initiative. 

On the Web

For information about the State Electronics Challenge, visit www.stateelectronicschallenge.net or call (802) 254-3636