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Dear Clients and Friends:

A recent study by the German federal environmental agency has confirmed what most of us already know, that the holding period for personal electronic products is getting much shorter. Which made me wonder, where do all the "old" products go?

Humans throw out about 100 billion pounds of electronics every year. In the U.S. alone, our annual e-waste easily outweighs the Great Pyramid of Giza. We all know these used products are toxic and should be recycled so they don't end up in a landfill. But there's a dirty little secret in the recycling industry. E-waste is often shipped to developing countries, which just moves the toxins over to someone else's back yard.

A non-profit group called the "Basel Action Network" (www.ban.org) reported last year on its undercover work. GPS trackers were planted into old printers and monitors, which were then turned over to American recyclers. The group found that 40% of these products weren't recycled here, but were instead being exported to highly polluting operations in third-world countries, mostly in Asia. Since almost all those exports were illegal under international or U.S. law, it's clear the regulations haven't been working.

There are several groups that provide certifications for American recycling companies. The leading certification is known as the R2 Standard. For some reason, R2 members have an even higher rate of export than uncertified companies. That makes no sense!

Recyclers with the lowest export rate are operating under the e-Stewards Standard, so I went to their website to find local companies that have received their certification. In the San Diego area, there's only one -- the Staples office supply stores.

Before recycling, play it safe by destroying all the data on computers, laptops and cell phones. Then drop them off at your nearest Staples. Outside the San Diego area, you can search for an e-Stewards recycler at http://e-stewards.org/find-a-recycler.

Regards,

Charles M. Shackelford