



REGIONAL INFORMATION BRIEF

Topic: Electronic Waste

July 2002

Electronic Waste (E-WASTE): *The Unnoticed Technological Legacy*

About 600 BC, the Greeks knew about the electric properties of amber (it acquires the power to attract light objects when rubbed). The English doctor William Gilbert used the Greek word *elektron*, "amber" to name electrical phenomena in his studies published one thousand years later. In 1752 Benjamin Franklin sustained his theory explaining the existence of two kinds of electricity, positive and negative. In 1879, Thomas Edison publicly exhibited his incandescent light bulb invention. The common denominator of these events is the fact that they have been major stepping stones in the transition from the industrial revolution in the 18th century to the edge of a *technological revolution* in the 21st century.

Technology is largely powered by electricity and commonly applied through electronic instruments. They range from extremely sophisticated communication systems such as satellites, global position systems (GPS), etc, to more every-day life devices such as television sets, cell phones, microwave ovens, etc.

These technological innovations have significantly enhanced the economies of entire nations. At the same time they are a source of an unprecedented problem: Electronic Waste.

Discarding electronic devices in sanitary landfills is becoming a practice of the past for two main reasons. First, California jurisdictions, under AB939, are required to divert from landfills 50% waste generated



Electronic waste is one of the fastest growing and most toxic sources of waste

What is E-Waste?

According to the California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB), "E-Waste is a popular, informal name for electronic products nearing the end of their "useful life." Computers, televisions, VCRs, stereos, copiers, and fax machines are common electronic products. Many of these products can be reused, refurbished, or recycled".

or face penalties of up to \$10,000 per day. E-waste diversion helps local governments to meet this requirement. Second, electronic devices contain toxic components that, when disposed of in a landfill, can potentially contaminate water supplies and the soil. TV sets and computer monitors are already banned from entering the waste stream.

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