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The Digital Switch is Here – Where Will the Old TVs Go?
Legislators, Local Government Representatives and Environmental Advocates
Sound the Call for Responsible Recycling

(HOUSTON, June 11, 2009) – When the switch to digital television signals becomes final tomorrow, environmental advocates want Texans to know: you can, and should, recycle your old televisions. Americans tossed out more than 20 million TV sets last year alone – this so-called “e-waste” typically contains lead, mercury and many other toxic materials. That’s according to recycling advocates and elected officials who gathered at the electronics recycling firm CompuCycle, Inc. today to urge residents to keep toxic electronic waste out of Texas landfills.

“Obsolete TVs and other electronics contain toxic components that can harm public health if we toss e-waste in landfills and incinerators,” said Zac Trahan, Program Director of the non-profit group Texas Campaign for the Environment. “Texans can protect our environment by extending the useful life of their televisions; or, if they are replacing a TV, recycle the old set responsibly,” he added.

The U.S. EPA estimates some 99 million old TV sets are not in use but are stored in garages, attics and basements in American households. The federal government provides a coupon system to help residents obtain analog-to-digital converter boxes to keep old TVs working, and environmentalists say re-use should be the first option. The FCC website www.dtv.gov contains information about keeping an old TV working. However, environmentalists also say many people will still trash their TVs if the manufacturers do not help recycle their products.

Texas Campaign for the Environment released the second edition of the national TV Recycling Report Card in which the majority of TV makers received failing grades.

“Although most TV makers aren’t making the grade, there has been progress with some major manufacturers stepping up to the plate,” said Trahan.

Right now, some TV-makers like Sony, Samsung and Panasonic already offer free recycling at limited locations throughout the Houston area. In fact, residents can bring any Sony or LG/Zenith products to CompuCycle for free recycling (they accept other brands as well, but charge a small fee). All Best Buy locations currently recycle TVs under 32” —you have to pay a \$10 fee, but you’ll receive a \$10 gift card to spend at the store. Details on which manufacturers provide free recycling and locations to drop off equipment can be found at www.texastakeback.com.

Environmentalists believe that new legislation will expand these options once it goes into effect. This year, a bill for TV recycling was passed by the Texas legislature; HB 821 is currently awaiting Governor Perry's signature.

"The TV recycling bill needs action by the Governor," said State Representative Armando Walle of Houston, who was a co-author of HB 821. "This legislation would require the TV makers to be responsible for the end of life of their products. Putting the manufacturers in charge of recycling gives them a reason to design TVs for recycling and to phase out the use of harmful materials. We urge Governor Perry to sign it into law and make it easier for Texans to recycle their obsolete electronics," Walle declared.

State Representative Carol Alvarado of Houston, another co-author of HB 821, added, "It is important for all Texans to make environmentally responsible choices on the eve of the DTV transition. Reusing or recycling TV sets can prevent taxpayers from having to shoulder the financial burden of incorrect disposal of TVs - namely the cleanup of environmental pollutants and the expansion of landfill facilities."

Local governments are unable to address the expense of recycling the huge number of televisions that are being retired due to the popularity of flat screens and the digital switch. Numerous cities and counties, including Houston and Harris County, were on record in support of producer takeback recycling legislation.

Harris County Commissioner (Precinct 2) Sylvia Garcia, who was also in attendance, said, "In Harris County, a region with a wide variety of ecological problems, we are always looking for a way to enhance our recycling programs as a way to improve our quality of life. After reviewing the Takeback Recycling Program, Harris County unanimously passed a resolution in support of state legislation establishing this program for manufacturers of computers and televisions."

CompuCycle President John Hess, whose company refurbishes and recycles electronic cast-offs such as TVs, monitors and computers, explained: "Most people don't know what happens to their old electronics even if they do make the effort to drop them off at a recycling center. It's important to ask whether your former assets are being disassembled into various parts to remove potentially hazardous materials for safe disposal and separate parts for re-use. This legislation is a tremendous opportunity to drive that message forward. Not only that, but an active grassroots movement to recycle e-waste will result in the creation of new green jobs in Texas--and that's good for everybody," he said.

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Texas State Legislature Representatives engaged in House Bill 821 and other e-waste recycling legislation:

State Rep. David Leibowitz, San Antonio (primary author)

Houston-area co-authors: State Reps. Carol Alvarado, Jessica Farrar, Ana Hernandez, and Amando Walle

Houston-area authors of similar TV recycling legislation: State Rep. Dennis Bonnen, State Sen. Glenn Hegar

Houston-area joint or co-authors of similar bills: State Reps. Rob Eissler, Alma Allen, Al Edwards and John Zerwas

ABOUT TEXAS CAMPAIGN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Texas Campaign for the Environment (TCE) is a non-partisan, non-profit citizens' organization. TCE is dedicated to informing and mobilizing Texans to protect the quality of their lives, their health, their communities and the environment. People have a right to know and a right to act on issues that fundamentally affect their lives and future generations; TCE works to give Texans the opportunity to channel their support for a clean and healthy environment into action. To find out more about TCE, visit www.texasenvironment.org.

ABOUT COMPUCYCLE, INC.

CompuCycle, Inc., (www.compucycle.net) prides itself on generating the highest possible value for retired electronic assets in the most environmentally responsible manner for corporate customers, small businesses, not-for-profit organizations, schools and consumers. The company creates programs for clients that achieve cost-savings and simplify computer life-cycle management. CompuCycle prides itself on its practices of refurbishing equipment and consumer products, preventing the exposure of confidential data and minimizing waste through refurbishing. CompuCycle and its employees are committed to ensuring that valuable and recyclable parts and resources are re-used as raw materials or parts, and that hazardous materials are disposed of in the safest, most environmentally sensitive manner. For more information, contact Clive Hess, Commercial Vice President, by emailing him at chess@compucycle.net.

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