



CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

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FACT SHEET

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The California State Auditor released the following report today:

Electronic Waste

Some State Agencies Have Discarded Their Electronic Waste Improperly, While State and Local Oversight Is Limited

BACKGROUND

Each year U.S. consumers generate tons of used or unwanted electronics and only recycle approximately 25 percent while discarding, primarily in landfills, the remaining electronic waste (e-waste). In California the Electronic Waste Recycling Act of 2003 provided funding for the safe recycling of certain electronic devices. With regards to how state agencies dispose of or recycle e-waste, four primary entities have a role at state and local levels: the California Integrated Waste Management Board (Waste Management Board) develops regulations for handling and disposing solid waste; the Department of Toxic Substances Control (Toxic Substances Control) develops and can enforce regulations for managing and disposing hazardous waste; the Department of General Services (General Services) establishes statewide policy regarding surplus property, including electronic devices and it reviews and approves how state agencies plan to dispose of their surplus property; and program agencies (typically local government) conduct inspections of entities that generate hazardous waste.

KEY FINDINGS

Our review concerning the disposal of e-waste between January 2007 and July 2008 by five state agencies revealed the following:

- ◆ Each improperly disposed of some electronic devices in the trash due to lack of clear communication from oversight agencies and general lack of knowledge about e-waste.
 - Three of the agencies disposed of 382 electronic devices and asserted that more than 350 of these were discarded in the trash.
 - Four state agencies did not have detailed duty statements specifically for their recycling coordinators.
 - Some state agencies report annually the amounts of e-waste they divert from the municipal waste stream, even though not required to do so, yet the reporting methods are inconsistent.
- ◆ Although the manner in which state agencies dispose of e-waste is subject to review by state and local oversight agencies, the reviews are infrequent and may not identify instances when state agencies improperly dispose of e-waste. The state reviews focus on whether state agencies properly complete surplus property reports and promptly dispose of surplus property rather than on how such property is actually disposed of. Reviews from program agencies may target inspections for a specific type of waste and may not include e-waste.
- ◆ While four of the five state agencies we reviewed used recyclers from General Services' master services agreement, one did not. Although the agencies are not required to use recyclers from the master services agreement, choosing a recycler that is not on the agreement may cause the State to incur additional expenses related to disposing e-waste.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We identified five alternative approaches for the Waste Management Board, Toxic Substances Control, and General Services to work together to clearly communicate to state agencies their responsibilities for handling and disposing of e-waste properly and resources available to assist them. Further, if the Legislature wants more targeted, frequent, or extensive oversight and information related to state agencies' recycling and disposal of e-waste, it should consider imposing requirements and assigning oversight responsibility to a specific agency. Additionally, we identified some best practices concerning the management and disposal of e-waste and recommended state agencies adopt those practices.

