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Give old electronics new life this holiday season

When you unwrap that shiny new TV or tablet this holiday season, you may feel the urge to get rid of some of the old electronics gathering dust in your basement. Under Wisconsin's electronics recycling law, many electronics cannot be put in the trash. E-Cycle Wisconsin provides convenient electronics recycling options for Wisconsin residents, with nearly 400 collection sites throughout the state.

Electronics contain valuable materials that can be recycled and reused. These materials include plastics, steel, glass and precious metals like gold and copper. Many devices also contain harmful materials such as lead, mercury, cadmium and chemical flame retardants. If electronics are disposed of improperly, these materials can harm human and environmental health. Lithium-ion batteries in electronics can also cause fires if not handled properly.

E-Cycle Wisconsin collectors may ask customers to pay a fee for some electronics, especially TVs and monitors. This fee will help cover the cost of recycling toxic or low-value materials in the device while keeping workers safe. While electronics manufacturers help fund electronics recycling, their payments do not always fully cover the cost of responsible collection and recycling. It may be up to you, the consumer, to cover the difference.

The costs of avoiding a recycling fee at registered collector could be much higher than people realize. Information stored on computers, cellphones, printers and other devices, like credit card numbers, social security numbers and passwords, can be accessed long after the device stops working. Responsible recyclers protect personal data by handling recycled electronics securely and destroying or completely wiping hard drives and other memory.

The DNR maintains an up-to-date list of collection sites, upcoming collection events and free mail-back programs registered with E-Cycle Wisconsin. Go to dnr.wi.gov and search "ecycle" for details..