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RECYCLING
ENTRANCE



Electronics Retailer Recycling Report Card

July 2013

Electronics TakeBack Coalition
www.electronicstakeback.com



TAKE IT BACK. MAKE IT GREEN. RECYCLE RESPONSIBLY.

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What We Found

A few leaders, but mostly laggards

Only three electronics retailers are making a serious effort to help consumers recycle our old electronics: Staples, Best Buy and Office Depot.

Four others have very limited programs, but most of the retailers (9 of the 16 we researched) have no real recycling program, including Walmart and Amazon, which are the second and third biggest electronics retailers, after Best Buy. (Amazon recycles its Kindles only.)

“Nine of the 16 retailers researched have no real recycling program.”

Retailer Report Card Grades		
Retailer	Grade	Total Points (Out of possible 60 total)
Staples	<u>B+</u>	43
Best Buy	<u>B</u>	38
Office Depot	<u>B</u>	34
Office Max	<u>C</u>	22
Radio Shack	<u>D</u>	20
Target	<u>D</u>	13
Microcenter	<u>D</u>	9
Amazon	<u>F</u>	4
Costco	<u>F</u>	0
Fry’s	<u>F</u>	1
hhgregg	<u>F</u>	2
Newegg	<u>F</u>	0
Sams Club	<u>F</u>	5
Sears	<u>F</u>	1
Tiger Direct	<u>F</u>	9
Systemax	<u>F</u>	9
Walmart	<u>F</u>	9

Table 1: Report card grades

Scoring
A = 46-60
B = 31-45
C = 21-30
D = 11-20

Secret recycling programs

A few retailers “technically” have recycling programs connected to their trade in programs, but they keep them secret. These companies got a deduction in their grade for lack of transparency.

- **Walmart and TigerDirect** have trade in programs that will allow you to send some items back for free recycling if they have no trade in value. But they don't mention it [anywhere](#) and it's unlikely most people will discover it. (Walmart even told us they had no recycling option like this.) But we've made it easy for you to see who takes what for recycling or trade in [here](#).
- **Sears** has the most secret recycling program (connected to its trade in program). Sears' [electronics recycling guide](#) makes no mention of their own trade in/recycling program. You will only find it on their Sears Holding Company website, not a place consumers are likely to look.
- **Micro Center** stores also don't publicize their recycling program beyond what they do to comply with a few state laws requiring them to take back their house brands; you have to know to ask about it at their stores.

Most retailers don't take back everything they sell.

We looked at 13 product categories, and found that almost all 16 stores in this report sold all 13 categories. We were surprised to see that the office stores are selling the full range of CE products, including TVs and game consoles.

We believe that if a retailer sells a category of products, they should take back that category for recycling (not just trade in). But that's not what we found.

Only **Best Buy** accepts all the categories that they sell for recycling.

In theory **Office Depot** also takes back all the categories, but because they must fit into a collection box 24" x 18" x 18," that means they don't really take back TVs and most printers.

Staples takes all but one category (TVs).

See Table 2 below, for details on each retailer

Do the retailers recycle what they sell?		Cell phones	Cameras	Desktops	E- Readers	Game Consoles	GPS	Laptops Tablets	Monitors	Music Players	Printers	Ink & toner	TVs	TV Peripherals ¹
Amazon	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	No	No	No	✓ ²	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Best Buy	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ <32"	✓
Costco	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Fry's	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
hhgregg	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Micro Center	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	No	✓	No	No	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	No
Newegg	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Office Depot	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Some ³	✓	Some ³	✓	Barely ³	✓
Office Max	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	No	✓	No	No	✓	✓	No	BluRay ⁵
Radio Shack	Sell it?	✓	✓	A few	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	A few	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	✓	No	No	No	Some
Sam's Club	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	✓	No	No	No	No
Sears	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	✓	No	No	No ⁴	No
Staples	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	✓
Tiger Direct	Sell it?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Recycle it? SECRET program	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	Flat panels	✓	No	No	Flat panels	BluRay ⁵

¹ TV peripherals are products plugged into the TV, including DVD players, VCRs, streaming, home theater, etc

² Amazon recycles Kindles, its own brand of e-readers, only.

³ Office Depot requires all recycled products to fit into one of their 3 recycling boxes. (They sell you an empty box and you fill it up.) The largest box is only 24" x 18" x 18." This size limit won't accommodate any CRT TVs or monitors, and only the tiniest of flat panel TVs. It also won't accommodate most printers. So for all intents and purposes, Office Depot doesn't really accept TVs into their program. They do accept their house brand monitors (Activa) in all stores.

⁴ Sears will only accept TVs for recycling if you are having them deliver a new one AND pay \$20.

⁵ Tiger Direct only accepts BluRay DVD players, no other peripherals

Table 2: What categories does each retailer sell and recycle?

Hardly anyone lets you drop off TVs or monitors for recycling.

Unless you live in a [state](#) that has a strong law requiring the manufacturers to collect and recycle TVs and monitors, consumers often have a hard time finding a place to take TVs for recycling.

Tube TVs contain 4 pounds or more of lead, and older LCD TVs contain mercury lamps. So these cost money to recycle responsibly (without simply exporting them to developing countries).

Plus, people just won't use mail back programs for large items like TVs and monitors. That's why we really need the retailers (where we buy our TVs) to play more of a role in collecting them back for recycling, offering physical collection sites.

Who has drop off locations for TVs for recycling?

- **Best Buy** is doing the most of any retailer to recycle TVs.
 - They accept TVs for recycling (including CRT tube TVs, which is what most people are getting rid of), up to 32 inches in their stores.
 - If you are getting home delivery of a theater system, they will take away your old TV.
 - Or if you are not having a new system delivered, they will come haul away a TV for a fee.

- **Micro Center** stores accept TVs "upon request" but they don't publicize this anywhere. They charge a fee in some stores.
- **Office Depot** claims to accept TVs, but no TV will fit into even the largest of their recycling boxes, and the largest box is only 24" x 18" x 18,"
- **SEARS** will take away TVs for \$20 if they are also delivering one to you.



Who has drop off locations for monitors for recycling?

- 📦 **Best Buy, Staples, and Micro Centers** accept monitors at their stores.
- 📦 **Office Depot** also does, but like with TVs, no CRT monitor will fit into their recycling box, although some very small flat panel monitors might. They do accept their house brand Altiva monitors at all stores.

Most retailers don't take printers either.

Most of the cheap consumer printers don't have enough value in them for a recycler to want them. So a lot of printers are currently going into the landfill.

- 📦 **Best Buy, Staples, Office Max, and Micro Center stores** do accept printers for recycling in their stores.
- 📦 In theory, **Office Depot** does, but most



won't fit into their return boxes, 24" x 18" x 18."

Several retailers are using responsible e-Stewards recyclers.

It's very important to look at what the retailer is doing with the e-waste they collect. There are a lot of recyclers who will simply export some non-working products to developing countries instead of recycling them. But recyclers certified to the e-Stewards standard, the highest in the industry, are not allowed to do that. So we look for use of e-Stewards recyclers as a measure of responsible recycling.



We encourage consumers to use only retailers (for recycling AND for purchases) that have e-Stewards recyclers. While our focus in this report was on recycling programs, we also looked to see if they are using an e-Steward for their trade in program.

We were pleased to see that several retailers are doing this:

- **Staples** – All their recycling goes to ERI, an e-Steward
- **Best Buy** – Currently one of their three electronics recyclers are e-Stewards. Best Buy announced that all their vendors must be certified to the e-Stewards standard this year.
- **Office Depot** – Their consumer recycling goes to Cloud Blue. However, their trade in program and their program

with the schools, however, goes to a non-e-Steward.

- **Radio Shack, Tiger Direct, and Walmart** use a trade in partner called CExchange, which works with ECS, a certified e-steward.

Lack of Transparency – What don't they want us to know?

One measure of success of a recycling or trade in program is the volume of products coming back for recycling or reuse (via trade in). Companies which are proud of their programs, should be happy to report on these volumes each year, and show year by year progress. There are many manufacturers who now do this with their programs.

But only **Best Buy, Office Depot, Office Max, and Staples** would actually disclose their recycling volumes to us. Micro Center reported volumes from only one store. Office Max couldn't separate out the volume of consumer recycling from what it generated from store business. Of these, only Office Depot reported on trade in volumes. While we'd prefer to see this information on company websites, we told the retailers they could just send us this information to get full credit for "transparency" on volumes.

But most refused to provide this data. **We can only conclude that programs that won't publish this data are not seeing significant volumes, and therefore don't want that information made public.**



States May Legislate: Three states introduced retailer takeback laws.

Three states introduced retailer takeback laws in 2013. In Oklahoma, SB 255 (McAffrey), in Wyoming, HB 254 (Petroff), and in Texas HB 1346 (M. González) would have required big box retailers to provide collection services for electronics recycling. Legislators in other states may follow suit if more retailers do not make meaningful progress on this issue.

Our Methodology for this Report Card



Why report on electronics retailers' recycling?

We believe that the retailers who sell us billions of dollars of consumer electronics in the U.S. each year should help consumers to recycle our old stuff when we are done with it.

While we strongly support the concept of “producer responsibility,” which gives the manufacturers responsibility to take back and recycle their old products, we think the retailers should also do their part, especially for the bigger stuff like TVs, monitors, and printers, that consumers can't easily mail back to the manufacturer take back programs.

According to the EPA, only about 25% of e-waste gets recycled each year, so we need the manufacturers, consumers and the retailers to each play a role in increasing the recycling rate.

What could be easier than to take your gadgets back for recycling to the place where you bought it?

What about online retailers?

They don't have stores to act as drop off sites

Increasingly, consumers are buying electronics online. But just because a retailer is internet based, we don't think that means they should take no responsibility for helping their customers recycle their products.

Take Amazon for example, the third largest electronics retailer. They have figured out how to provide physical drop off locations for the products they are selling – they have delivery lockers in retail stores all over the U.S., including Staples, Seven/Eleven, and Rite Aid. Why couldn't they apply that same kind of logistics ingenuity to a recycling collection system?



How we selected the retailers

We wanted to do a report card on the top consumer electronics retailers in the U.S. Here's what we did.

- **Start with the top 25** retailers (in electronics sales) from [the Dealerscope Top 101](#) CE Retailers in North America report.
- **Take out the manufacturers.** Not surprisingly, many of the top CE retailers are the CE manufacturers themselves. We do a separate report on manufacturer takeback programs. So we took out Dell, HP, and Apple from the top 25.
- **Take out Business to Business retailers.** Our report is aimed at consumers. So we took out a few retailers who sell primarily to business: CDW, PC Connection, PC Mall.
- We also took out **GameStop**, which mostly sells software (video games) not equipment and **WalMart Canada**, since this is a US report.

- That left the 16 companies on this report.

Top 16 Electronics Retailers	
Company	CE sales 2012 in BILLIONS \$
Best Buy US	31.55
Walmart US	21.10
Amazon	19.00
Staples	7.88
Target	7.00
Costco	6.03
Radio Shack	4.33
Sams Club	3.39
Office Max	2.97
Newegg	2.70
Systemax Tiger Direct	2.27
Sears	2.21
Frys	2.00
Micro Center	1.80
Office Depot	1.71
hgregg	1.32

Figure 3: How much is each retailer selling?
Source: Dealerscope Magazine, March 2013, [the Dealerscope Top 101](#)

How we scored

We evaluated the retailers' programs against criteria in four categories:

Criteria	Why this matters
<p>1. General characteristics of program, including</p> <p>Is it just mail back, or are there physical collection sites</p> <p>Do they take back all the same categories they sell, or only the ones they can make money on?</p>	<p>Most people won't use mail back for recycling. They want physical collection sites to bring back TVs, monitors, and other big items.</p> <p>If you are selling the most difficult to recycle products, you should also collect them for recycling, and not just cherry pick the high value items.</p>
<p>2. Transparency on Volumes.</p> <p>Are they disclosing publicly how much comes back for reuse and recycling in the program?</p>	<p>If you are doing a good job at collecting used electronics for reuse or recycling, you would make this information public. When we see that companies don't publicize volumes, we have to assume they are LOW.</p>
<p>3. Performance – How much is actually coming back?</p>	<p>This tells us whether anyone is actually using the program, or if it's mostly a paper program.</p>
<p>4. Responsible Recycling, including:</p> <p>Do they have good policies against allowing toxic e-waste to be exported to developing nations?</p> <p>Do they use recyclers certified to e-Stewards standard, the highest standard in the industry?</p>	<p>Responsible recycling starts with a detailed, strong company policy. If you have no policy, you are not asking your vendors to live up to it.</p> <p>Only the e-Stewards standard prohibits vendors from exporting untested or non-working products (with toxics) to developing countries. So retailers who want to be sure their vendors are not contributing to this export problem should use e-Stewards.</p>

More Details. You can see a list of the specific criteria and why each one is important, [here](#). We sent this list to all of these retailers on April 29, letting them know what we would be looking for in our report.

Focus on recycling, and not on trade in programs

This report focuses primarily on retailer recycling programs, not on trade in programs. We think it's good to have trade in programs - they provide an economic incentive that may


encourage some people to bring or send back their old products sooner than later, rather than just setting them aside in the drawer or closet.

But there are plenty of trade in programs to choose from. And most of them only give trade in money for the smaller, newer, high value products like phones and tablets, and not the items that are the most difficult for people to get rid of, like TVs, monitors, TV peripherals (VCRs, DVD players, satellite boxes, etc.) and printers/fax/copiers. Those will have little or no trade in value, so we need recycling options for them.

CONSUMERS GUIDE TO USING RETAILERS' ELECTRONICS RECYCLING & TRADE-IN PROGRAMS

Use our new [Consumers Guide](#) to find out which retailers take what products for recycling or trade in.

CONSUMERS GUIDE TO USING RETAILERS' ELECTRONICS RECYCLING & TRADE-IN PROGRAMS



Who Takes What?
Many electronics retailers have programs allowing consumers to recycle or trade in their old electronics. This chart shows which products each retailer accepts, and whether you can drop products off at their stores, or if you must ship them somewhere. (Shipping is usually free, but you will have to box it up, making this much less convenient.)

Use a Responsible e-Steward Recycler
We strongly encourage consumers to use the retailer programs that work with certified e-Steward recyclers, which are certified to the highest standards in the industry. See right hand column below.

Key
RECYCLE: Retailer will recycle the product categories indicated.
TRADE-IN: Retailer has a trade-in program for the categories indicated.
E-STEWARD: Retailer's trade-in program is also an e-Steward program. They will recycle the items for free, if they have no trade-in value.
STOR: You can drop off items at the STORE (except where prohibited by local laws).
SHIP: You must ship your items.

	Cell Phones	Cameras	Desktops	E-Readers	Game Consoles	GPS	Laptops & Tablets	Monitors	Music Players	Printers	IP & Tablet	TVs	TV Peripherals	Details & Store/Ship	Using e-Steward Recycler?	
Amazon	RECYCLE			RECYCLE										DETAILS	NO	
Best Buy	RECYCLE	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	DETAILS	SOME E-STEWARD	
Costco	RECYCLE	COSTCO HAS NO RECYCLING OR TRADE-IN PROGRAM												NO PROGRAM		
Fry's	RECYCLE	SHIP	FRY'S HAS NO RECYCLING OR TRADE-IN PROGRAM												NO PROGRAM	
Highgear	RECYCLE	SHIP	BETTER THAN ACCEPTING SMART PHONES - HIGHGEAR HAS NO RECYCLING OR TRADE-IN PROGRAM												STORES	NO
Micro Center	RECYCLE	SHIP	SHIP			SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	SHIP	STORES	NO	
Newegg	RECYCLE	NEWEGG HAS NO RECYCLING OR TRADE-IN PROGRAM												NO PROGRAM		

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