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Rocky Mountain Poll

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MOUNTAINS OF TOXIC ELECTRONIC WASTE IN ARIZONA HOMES ONLY 18% WOULD DISPOSE OF THEM AT SPECIAL RECYCLING CENTERS

Phoenix, Arizona, October 1, 2009. In Arizona, half of households have stored in their basements, garages and closets, unused televisions, computer monitors, computers, printers, fax machines or audio or video player equipment, which contain toxic materials that can leach into ground water if the equipment were disposed of in landfills.

And from their answers on where they would dispose of such materials if they were to do so today, it seems that most do not know that there are businesses here that already accept electronic waste from consumers both at their central facilities and at disposal fairs held throughout the year. Indeed, only 18 percent say they would today dispose of such materials by taking them to specialized electronic recycling centers. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 2.6 million tons of electronic waste were dropped into landfills during 2007, the most recent year for which data is available. Once such equipment is buried, poisons such as chlorinated solvents and heavy metals leach from it into the soil and groundwater.

When consumers were asked how they would dispose of their old equipment, most (39%) say they would donate it to a charity, presumably in the hope that the charity would properly dispose of it. But many charities we contacted will only accept a limited range of such materials and some do not want electronic waste at all because it just creates a disposal problem for them. Other Arizona consumers say they would try to get rid of the old equipment by palming it off on friends (25%) or simply putting it into the garbage destined for landfills(15%). Three percent admit they have no idea what to do with the stuff and would just hang onto it.

Since 2007, 18 states and some cities such as New York have approved laws making manufacturers responsible for recycling electronics. Similar statutes were introduced in another 13 states during 2009.¹ The laws are designed to prevent electronic equipment from ending up in landfills where the leaching of toxic materials into groundwater from this equipment creates a potential danger to public health.

There are some private companies in Arizona that specialize in receiving and recycling or otherwise disposing of used electronic equipment, but given the high percentage of consumers who continue

(Continue)

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to store the materials at home and the apparent low consumer awareness of such recycling facilities, it may be reasonable to conclude that much material that is currently stored in garages and closets will still end up in city trash barrels unless specialized collection centers do more to make the public aware of their services and locations. Most of the existing specialized recycling companies appear principally oriented to providing services to business, industry, and government rather than to resident recycling.

On the other hand, given the high awareness among Arizonans that disposing of the materials in landfills is dangerous to the environment, and the fact that so many people are hanging on to equipment they can no longer use, it would seem that Arizona may be ready for laws and private sector programs to help properly dispose of such materials and make sure they stay out of landfills.

The low levels of homeowners who say they would take their electronic equipment to recycling facilities may reflect the simple reality that except for limited duration recycling days provided by private companies, public awareness of the programs is limited at best. Awareness of the existence of such facilities declines in the rural counties and among younger consumers (who are among the most likely to own and update their electronic equipment), and falls off in middle and lower income groups. It also appears that a special public information campaign may be needed for Hispanic consumers who are among both the most likely to have unused equipment at home (59%) and the most likely to believe that it is okay to dispose of such materials in the garbage (34%).

¹ New York Times June 30, 2009, Page 1

EDITOR'S NOTE: This Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona (2009-III-04), is based on 800 interviews with adult heads of household across Arizona conducted between September 9 and 18, 2009. Where necessary, figures for age, sex, race and political party were weighted to bring them into line with their actual proportion in the population. In a sample of this size, one can say with a 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 3.5 percent of what they would have been had the entire population been surveyed. The Rocky Mountain Poll is conducted by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona and is an independent and non-partisan research program sponsored by the Center. This statement conforms to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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ENCLOSED: Statistical data for reference.

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“Do you have any of the following kind of unused electronic equipment stored in closets, your garage or other places around your home?”

Television or computer monitors	33%
Computers, printers or fax machines	28
Music or movie players of any kind	28
(ANY OF THE ABOVE)	(50%)

ANY UNUSED ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT STORED AT HOME

Age: 35 to 54	62%
Income: \$85,000 +	62
Hispanics	59
Rural counties	56
Pima County	56
Income: \$45,000 to \$84,999	54
Asian/Native American	50
Caucasian	48
Income: under \$45,000	47
Maricopa County	46
Age: under 35	44
Age: 55 +	38

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*“As far as you know, are computers, computer monitors, TVs, printers and other related computer electronic equipment safe or not safe to dispose of in the city operated landfills?”*

|                  | Safe | Unsure | Not Safe |
|------------------|------|--------|----------|
| <b>TOTAL</b>     | 11%  | 14%    | 75%      |
| <u>Gender</u>    |      |        |          |
| Men              | 17   | 16     | 67       |
| Women            | 5    | 12     | 83       |
| <u>Age</u>       |      |        |          |
| Under 35         | 14   | 9      | 77       |
| 35 to 54         | 10   | 10     | 80       |
| 55+              | 8    | 24     | 68       |
| <u>County</u>    |      |        |          |
| Maricopa         | 13   | 13     | 74       |
| Pima             | 11   | 14     | 75       |
| Rural            | 4    | 15     | 81       |
| <u>Ethnicity</u> |      |        |          |
| Caucasian        | 7    | 15     | 78       |
| Hispanic         | 34   | 2      | 64       |
| Other            | 16   | 12     | 72       |

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“If you wished to get rid of the unused electronic equipment, which of the following would you most likely do?” (READ LIST)

Donate to a charity	39%
Give or sell to friends	25
Take to a specialized recycling facility	18
Put in garbage	15
Would keep it	3

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