Before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

Recycling Electronics:
A Common Sense Solution for Enhancing Government Efficiency and Protecting Our Environment

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Introduction

Senator Carper, Senator Coburn and Members of the Committee:

My name is Walter Alcorn and I am the Vice President for Environmental Affairs and Industry Sustainability for the Consumer Electronics Association® (CEA).

The Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) is the technology trade association representing the $208 billion U.S. consumer electronics industry. More than 2,000 companies enjoy the benefits of CEA membership, including legislative advocacy, market research, technical training and education, industry promotion, standards development and the fostering of business and strategic relationships. CEA also owns and produces the International CES – The Global Stage for Innovation. All profits from CES are reinvested into CEA's industry services. Find CEA online at www.CE.org, www.DeclareInnovation.com, www.GreenerGadgets.org and through social media.

By extending information and entertainment to everyone – regardless of income or geographic location – our members' products have improved lives and changed the world. America stands as the global leader in innovation, ingenuity and creativity, and the competition and falling prices characteristic of our industry continue to bring benefits to consumers.

We understand that a primary responsibility shared by manufacturers of consumer electronics lies in product design. The innovation and rapid evolution inherent in the technology industry have resulted in dramatic design changes in product form and function, and a decrease in our industry's overall environmental footprint with smaller and lighter products.

Advances in technology have been accompanied by large reductions in the consumption of energy, fewer materials of potential concern, and other positive environmental benefits. The big television that used to sit on the floor in a wooden console now hangs safely on the wall with two or three times the viewing area and a far superior picture quality – and using a fraction of the electricity. And the personal computer system that came in multiple, heavy pieces now goes with you wherever you go – and might even fit in your pocket.

Furthermore, manufacturers use significant amounts of recycled content, such as glass, plastics and metals, in the production of new devices. Detail of these and other environmental initiatives in the consumer electronics industry are highlighted in the *CEA*

2013 Sustainability Report provided with this written testimony and available at www.ce.org/sustainability.

Electronics Recycling Goals

While older consumer electronics (CE) may have reached the end of their lives or be out-of-date, many contain materials and components that would be a waste to be completely discarded. Most consumer electronic products contain valuable materials, such as metals and plastics that can be resold in the commodities market by recyclers.

CE manufacturers and retailers recognize this and support electronics recycling efforts like never before. In April 2011 a dozen leading CE companies met at the Best Buy store on Wisconsin Avenue in Washington, DC to create the eCycling Leadership Initiative and issued an unprecedented national challenge to recycle responsibly one billion pounds of electronics annually by 2016 – the "Billion Pound Challenge." Achievement of this stretch goal would be a three-fold increase over the amount of CE recycled by our industry in 2010. Backing up this commitment is the issuance of annual reports on our industry's progress, which we have published the past two years (attached to this written testimony and available at www.ce.org/ecycle), and the third annual report scheduled for this April.

Electronics Recycling Results

In April 2013 CEA reported 580 million pounds of CE recycled responsibly by our industry in third-party certified recycling facilities – an increase of 25 percent over the

previous year and about halfway to our billion pound goal. Our manufacturers and retailers provide more than 8,000 public, ongoing collection locations around the country – all of which can be found through an online zip code locator created by CEA at GreenerGadgets.org. CEA also created and distributed public service announcements for radio and television, reached out to consumers through traditional and social media on numerous occasions, and incorporated full implementation of a national recycling system into our organizational goals. According to a 2012 CEA survey 63 percent of all consumers know how and where to recycle their old electronics – up from 58 percent two years earlier, still not high enough but moving in the right direction.

In 2013 CEA published the second annual report of the eCycling Leadership Initiative and recognized 13 companies for their leadership in recycling consumer electronics. Last fall CEA awarded the first industry eCycling Leadership Awards to four companies with exceptional recycling performance – Best Buy, Dell, HP and Samsung. CEA salutes these and other companies in our industry that are working to make recycling electronics as easy as purchasing new ones.

Challenges

Collecting used electronics for recycling continues to present the largest operational challenge. According to our research the average household contains 28 distinct electronic products, and re-aggregating these products when they are ready for the electronics collection and recycling systems continues to be a daunting challenge. However, two new hurdles have emerged during recent years.

First is the patchwork of diverging state electronics recycling programs and laws. Exactly half of the U.S. states have enacted some form of electronics recycling mandate and, unsurprisingly, no two states have the same program. For CE manufacturers there are now 21 separate registration forms to fill out, 19 different annual state registration fees to pay, 15 state-specific annual recycling reports to file – all with different calendars and deadlines - and lots of wasted energy and resources going towards administrative activities instead of collection and recycling. We need a national framework for electronics recycling in the United States and CEA strongly supports legislation authorizing an industry-driven, harmonized system for recycling consumer electronics.

Second is the market challenge for recycling leaded glass from old Cathode Ray Tube, or CRT, televisions and computer monitors. Until about a decade ago the demand for old CRT glass to make new CRT displays was strong. However, as is common in our industry, new and better technologies like LCD, plasma and LED hit the market and have displaced the older, lower-quality CRT technology. CRT sales plummeted and now there is only one factory in the world producing new CRT displays. Not surprisingly this has meant much weaker demand for recovered CRT glass.

CEA has recognized this and in May, 2013 hosted a cross-stakeholder meeting at CEA's offices to daylight and discuss the current operational and regulatory situation for recycling CRT glass. CEA also has co-sponsored two crowd-sourcing challenges to find new recycling approaches and applications for CRT glass, first in conjunction with the

Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) in 2012 and again last year in partnership with the Institute for Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI). Winners of these challenges included a CRT glass processing system from NuLife Glass – who is now building a CRT processing facility near Buffalo, New York – and a proposed solution from an independent scientist for using recycled CRT glass as a component for vitrification of nuclear waste. While CEA recognizes that these technologies and applications hold promise much more needs to be done to promote these and other approaches to ensure adequate market demand for CRT glass.

How to Increase Responsible Recycling

CEA recommends the creation of a national, harmonized industry-driven framework for recycling consumer electronics to facilitate more efficient electronics recycling. A national framework should be structured to maximize the use of market forces and ensure a level playing field across CE manufacturers, incorporate the ideal of share responsibility for key system functions like collection and consumer education, ensure that recycling is done responsibly, and result in convenient collection opportunities for the consumer. In lieu of a blanket federal mandate CEA recommends a federal framework that authorizes implementation of a harmonized, cross-state consumer electronics recycling system in specific states when mutually agreed to by a CE industry representative organization and state officials. CEA and its members are working to develop the operational infrastructure for an industry representative organization and look forward to working with this Committee and others in Congress to improve the U.S. system for recycling consumer electronics.

The federal government should also set a good example by ensuring that all federal e-waste is responsibly recycled. And to help address shortfalls in the CRT recycling market, the federal government should step up procurement of materials such as recycled CRT glass whenever the economics make sense, is safe and environmentally sound, and function of those recycled materials meets government specifications.

Conclusion

Finding a solution to this public policy challenge is a priority for CEA and our industry. As we continue to make strides in eco-friendly design initiatives, lead the consumer electronics industry on environmental issues and be a part of the effort to educate consumers about electronics recycling, CEA stands ready to work with Congress and all interested parties to reach a common-sense, national solution that makes recycling as convenient as possible for all Americans.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share CEA's position on this important public policy issue. I look forward to addressing any questions you may have.