



Extended Use

Sustainable Electronics Stewardship in the Federal Government

The federal government has always been a strong advocate of sustainable environmental stewardship in its mission of safeguarding the welfare of all its citizens. This is especially the case when new environmental challenges surface, such as the management of our electronic assets.

The federal government is the largest block purchaser of electronics in the world. In fiscal year 2004, federal agencies awarded a total of \$155 billion in information technology (IT) contracts for products and services. The majority of the 1.8 million employees in the federal government have a personal computer. Therefore, given an average three-year lifecycle, the government discards approximately 10,000 computers each week. In addition to the volume of waste generated, the volume of hazardous chemicals—such as lead and mercury—associated with the electronics waste is also an issue.

Participants can lead by example and collectively make a difference for environmental conservation efforts.

But the environmental issues relating to electronics go beyond how we dispose of them. They also include how we use them and even how they are made. On Nov. 15, 2004 (America Recycles Day), the Executive Office of the President, together with 11 federal departments and agencies, committed to advancing the electronics stewardship goals and practices in the government. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the largest IT purchasers and users in the federal government will become the foundation for building and nurturing practices and approaches that improve the quality, performance and environmental management of federal electronic assets throughout their lifecycles.

The combined purchasing power of the charter signatories represents approximately 80 percent of the total annual IT budget for the federal government. Together, they will shift the marketplace toward more environmentally sustainable electronic products and services. Their combined purchasing power will help to transform the availability of IT products and services that are environmentally sustainable in the Federal marketplace and will make such products and services available for the general consumer as well.

The MOU signatories have committed themselves to the following electronics stewardship goals:

- Increase demand for more energy efficient and environmentally sustainable electronic equipment that is cost-effective, while maintaining or improving equipment quality and performance.

- Promote the implementation of best lifecycle management practices for electronic equipment and share identified best practices with those outside the federal government.
- Reduce the economic and environmental lifecycle costs of federal electronic equipment.
- Promote the growth of the market and infrastructure for the reuse, demanufacturing and recycling of obsolete electronic equipment; and
- Coordinate and cooperate on other public and private-sector efforts aimed at achieving similar objectives.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Signatories also have become partners in the Federal Electronics Challenge (FEC), a voluntary partnership program that encourages federal departments, agencies and facilities to purchase more environmentally sustainable electronic products, reduce the impacts of electronic products during use and manage obsolete electronics in an environmentally safe and cost-effective way. To date, 44 federal facilities have joined the FEC.

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), a gold level pilot partner, used the FEC as both a top-down and a bottom-up approach to ensure integration among the different lifecycle phases of electronics — from purchase to use to end-of-life management. Some of the many accomplishments include the following in their electronics procurement contracts: extending the lifespan of their PCs to five years; making 100 percent of their electronic equipment purchases ENERGY STAR-compliant; and including environmental attributes, such as low or no mercury content, recyclable content and potential for take-back.

Brian Furusama, CIO for the BPA, agrees that the FEC has “provided the structure to strengthen communications and served as the resource for employee awareness and education to develop a common understanding about electronics stewardship.”

Each federal employee has the opportunity to make a significant contribution to promote the management of our electronic assets in an environmentally sound and energy-efficient manner. Through the FEC, the participants can lead by example and collectively make a big difference that will gain long-term benefits for their environmental and natural resource conservation efforts.

If you are interested in learning more about the FEC, how you can become a partner and how you can help implement greener, more effective, and efficient electronics lifecycle practices across the federal government, please visit the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive Web site at www.ofee.gov, or go to the FEC web site at www.federalelectronicschallenge.net.

Edwin Piñero is federal environmental executive with the Environmental Protection Agency.