

Frustrations mount as city consumers struggle to get rid of their techno-trash

BY [Karina Ioffee](#)

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Old computers, [iPods](#), cell phones - [Brian Boyd's](#) got 'em all.

But when Boyd, who runs a social media company, TrakVu, out of his [Upper West Side](#) apartment, wanted to get rid of some of his electronics, he didn't know what to do with the stuff.

"I usually try to sell it on [eBay](#), but who has the time?" Boyd said, adding that he had no idea where there might be a recycling center that would accept old electronics.

As our lives become filled with more gadgets, New Yorkers are being confronted with a growing problem: What to do with old electronics that, at least in the view of their owners, are garbage?

According to the [Lower East Side Ecology Center](#), one of numerous groups that hold collection events throughout the year, an estimated 21,000 tons of e-waste is disposed of improperly in [New York City](#).

Recycling electronics is challenging and expensive, and many old computers and televisions - laden with mercury, lead and other dangerous chemicals - inevitably end up in landfills, according to the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#).

There also is a black market among recyclers who ship e-waste to developing countries, primarily in [Africa](#) and [Asia](#), where old electronics are disassembled for parts.

The city passed a law last year requiring electronics manufacturers to recycle or reuse any of their electronic products. But a lawsuit by an industry group has put enforcement on hold.

"No other place on earth says you have to show up at a resident's doorstep to collect old electronics," complained [Rick Goss](#), vice president of environment and sustainability at the [Information Technology Industry Council](#), a group of 43 manufacturers that is one of three plaintiffs to the lawsuit.

The council argues that collecting e-waste should be a shared responsibility, especially since the city already has an infrastructure for collecting trash and recyclables. The manufacturers also argue that the requirement would put more trash vehicles on city streets, adding to congestion and polluting emissions.

The city contends the lawsuit "is standing in the way of our e-waste program, [which] requires manufacturers of certain equipment to take responsibility for their products being appropriately discarded," said [Hilary Meltzer](#), senior counsel of the environmental division of the city Law Department.

The regulation "is similar to other product stewardship laws," she added.

The [Natural Resources Defense Council](#), a co-defendant in the suit, said the electronics industry is misrepresenting what manufacturers would have to do.

"There is nowhere in the law that says companies have to do individual pickups," said [Kate Sindig](#), deputy director of the council's New York Urban Program. "For example, they could organize a monthly collection or something similar."

The city Department of Sanitation Web site lists dozens of locations where consumers can drop off old electronics. Some retailers, such as [Staples](#), [Best Buy](#), [RadioShack](#) and [Office Depot](#), allow it, but check their Web sites for possible fees and rules.

The issue is difficult in a dense city like [New York](#) because for many residents it would be a burden to lug an old desktop computer, TV set, VCR or stereo tuner to the store where they bought it or a collection site.

Many companies also offer programs where consumers can ship old computers and other hardware back for a nominal fee.

Amid the boom in handheld gadgets, with households increasingly owning more than one computer and following the switch earlier this year to digital television, the volume of electronics that needs to be recycled is sure to continue growing rapidly.

Environmental groups are pushing for studies that would determine whether manufacturing processes can be adjusted to make electronics easier to recycle.

But for now, many consumers like Boyd are frustrated trying to figure out how to dispose of their old technology in a way that respects the environment.

"Some places charge you to drop off, other places have very strict hours, while others only accept certain things," he said. "The whole thing needs to be easier."



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Properly disposing of old electronics can be more difficult than choosing them in the first place. Brian Boyd (below) is frustrated by the process.