

February 25, 2008**EDITORIAL**

A Hazardous Afterlife

Americans have a voracious appetite for new technology, but it comes with a cost not included on the price tag: electronic waste is the fastest-growing part of the garbage stream. Much of the equipment contains toxic substances, like mercury, lead and cadmium. And once in landfills and incinerators, the poisons are on their way into soil, water tables and the air. The problem can be controlled, but only if everyone commits to recycling.

When it comes to traditional recycling, Washington has left the states and localities to fend for themselves, and many are doing the job well. As for electronic waste, 10 states have programs, and this month, New York's City Council approved a sensible e-waste bill.

Beginning in 2010, any consumer who throws a TV, computer, printer or MP3 into the trash would have to pay a \$100 dollar fine. The measure requires each manufacturer to come up with a plan to allow purchasers to return products for recycling. By 2012, producers would have to collect 25 percent of the average weight of sales in the city in the previous three years; by 2018, the percentage rises to 65 percent.

Considering the size of the New York market, this approach should encourage producers to minimize or eliminate the use of toxic substances in their products.

Unfortunately, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has impressive green credentials, isn't getting with this program. He is threatening to veto the bill, and says that if the Council overrides his veto, he won't enforce the law. We urge him to look at how well a similar law is working in Minnesota. There is no reason Mr. Bloomberg and the City Council speaker, Christine Quinn, shouldn't be able to reach a compromise, perhaps by initially easing fines for manufacturers who show a good-faith effort.

The mayor once also rejected recycling for metals, glass and plastics, but he courageously came around and admitted he was wrong. New York produces some 25,000 tons of electronics garbage a year. The City Council's bill is a necessary first step to deal with all that waste.

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