



The Essex-Windsor Solid Waste Authority drop off collects typical E-waste.

Right across Canada most of this techno-trash ends up in landfills. In 2002, Canada sent 52,000 tonnes of E-waste annually to landfill and by 2005 it is estimated that this number will have increased to over 70,000 tonnes.

Why is this a problem? The composition of a personal computer and monitor includes the following:

Component	% Composition
Silica / glass	25%
Ferrous metal	20%
Plastics	23%
Aluminum	14%
Copper	7%
Lead	6%
Zinc	2%
Various precious metals*	3%
100% Total	

*Precious metals include nickel, manganese, cobalt, barium, tin, silver, antimony, chromium, cadmium, selenium, mercury, gold and arsenic. Essex-Windsor Solid Waste Authority

By 2005, the amount of disposed electronic junk from computers and peripherals will double to more than 67,000 tonnes in Canada alone, according to Environment Canada. This means an estimated 4,740 tonnes of lead found in personal computers and TVs is thrown away each year in Canada, and by next year discarded PCs will contain an estimated 4.5 tonnes of cadmium and 1.1 tonnes of mercury.

When these components are illegally dumped and crushed in landfills, the lead is released into the environment, posing a hazardous legacy for current and future generations. Consumer electronics already constitute 40% of lead found in landfills. About 70% of the heavy metals, including mercury and other hazardous substances found in electronics, can contaminate groundwater and pose other environmental and public health risks."

"Poison PCs and Toxic TVs: California's Biggest Environmental Crisis That You've Never Heard Of"
Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition

Part B – Looking Back

The Hidden Monster

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? Happy staff, smooth-running technology... we really seem to be moving forward. I was smiling - and then I came across a disturbing sight. I came across a storeroom FULL of all the technology we had happily discarded. I'm sure you can picture this... stacks of old 486 and P1 computer carcasses, rows of small 15-inch monitors, dot matrix printers... truly a technology graveyard. What happens to all this, I wondered.

It's great to see the technology being upgraded and replaced regularly, but disturbing to explore what really happens to the discarded items... the "techno-trash". Our schools and our homes are creating an incredible volume of technology trash. The volume of obsolete computers, cell phones, and electronic equipment thrown out or temporarily stored for later disposal is already a serious problem that is escalating at a rapid rate.

"E-waste is generated at alarming rates due to obsolescence — due to the extreme rates of obsolescence, E-waste produces much higher volumes of waste in comparison to other consumer goods. The increasingly rapid evolution of technology combined with rapid product obsolescence has effectively rendered everything disposable. Consumers now rarely take broken electronics to a repair shop as replacement is now often easier and cheaper than repair.