



WHEREAS:

Costco is a major U.S. retailer of consumer electronics, and such devices contain toxic materials such as lead, mercury, cadmium, brominated flame retardants, polyvinyl chloride, and are difficult to recycle.

Only about 25% of discarded electronics are collected for recycling, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. E-waste is the fastest growing and most hazardous component of the municipal waste stream, comprising more than 5%. The estimated collection rate for e-waste lags the 34% U.S. recovery rate for municipal waste.

Improper disposal of electronics can result in serious public health and environmental impacts. Analog TV sets and monitors contain large amounts of lead, flat screen monitors contain mercury switches, and computer batteries contain cadmium, which can be harmful to human health. Lead and mercury can leach out of landfills into groundwater. If plastic components are incinerated, cancer-causing dioxins and furans can be created. Laptop computer batteries contain heavy metals that can leak into groundwater supplies once batteries erode.

Our competitor Best Buy takes back a wide variety of electronics for free and Staples and Office Depot also offer take back. Best Buy's actions have kept 180 million pounds of electronics out of landfills in the last three years. "Costco currently has no recycling program available to customers, despite being the sixth largest consumer electronics retailer in the U.S.," stated the Electronics Take Back Coalition in giving Costco a failing grade in a 2013 report card.

In addition to providing collection, responsible processing is also a priority. Electronic goods collected for recycling in the U.S. are often improperly shipped to developing countries where they are handled in a manner that endangers human health and the environment. Reports by Basel Action Network have revealed appalling conditions in China and parts of Africa where workers break apart old electronic equipment under primitive conditions. These countries lack infrastructure to safely manage hazardous waste. Components are openly burned, soaked in acid baths, or dumped in rivers, creating serious environmental and health impacts due to toxics in the products. If flame retardants are burned, they can emit dioxin and furans, which workers and nearby residents may inhale, or which may land on crops and grass, and be absorbed via the food chain. Collected electronics should be refurbished or recycled by responsible electronics recyclers who are independently verified to meet a leading certification standard such as the e-Stewards standard.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That Costco's board of directors prepare a report, at reasonable cost and excluding confidential information, on the company's policy options to reduce potential pollution and public health problems from electronic waste generated as a result of its sales to consumers, and to increase the safe recycling of such wastes.

SUPPORTING STATEMENT:

The proponent believes such a report should consider, but not necessarily be limited to, strategies to facilitate effective management of consumers' electronic wastes and to prevent improper export of hazardous e-waste.