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Local plant recycles electronics, employs disabled

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Ever wondered where old computers end up? An electronic waste recycling plant in Sunrise is working to keep them and other old electronics from hurting the environment.

For more than seven years, the plant at the Achievement and Rehabilitation Center of Broward, based in Sunrise, has been collecting tons of electronic waste – including computers, printers, fax machines, phones and TVs – reselling what still works or can be repaired, and recycling what is useless.

"We were green even before it was cool to be green," said Matt Leachman, the center's director of marketing and development. "If it goes into the land field, they have chemicals that eventually won't be good for us. A lot of it is still in good shape or can be recycled."

ARC Broward, a nonprofit dedicated to providing support for disabled children and adults in the community, uses the plant as a job training facility for disabled adults who later move on to other jobs in the community through the center's job placement department.

At least 164 people stopped by the last electronic waste drop off coordinated by ARC Broward and the county at Sunrise City Hall earlier this month. They left behind 61 monitors and 39 TVs of all sizes, among other things, said Deborah McPherson, public education coordinator with the county's Waste and Recycling Services.

The electronics contained at least 500 pounds of the toxic metal lead, which presents an enormous harm the environment, McPherson said.

Instead, the electronics ended up at the ARC Broward facility.

Once at the plant, everything is carefully inspected and those items that are still functioning are either distributed to other nonprofit organizations or sold.

"The amount of things we are throwing away keeps growing," Leachman said. "A lot of people are getting rid of good TVs just to get a flat screen one."

The center sells functioning electronics either directly from the center or through eBay. What doesn't work is separated by material, such as plastic or copper, and sold in bulk to recycling plants.

Last year alone, the center disposed of almost 1 million pounds of residential-use electronics. This year, the number will pass the 1 million mark, said Jerry Motter, work force development director of the center. He also expects the amount of commercial-use waste to reach half a million pounds this year.

But locals don't have to wait for the next electronic waste drop off event to properly dispose the old electronics piling up in their garage. The ARC Broward plant is open to the public during regular business hours. ARC Broward will also pick up property for free. Only firms with more than 25 employees have to pay a fee for the disposal.

Also, according to McPherson, those thinking of disposing of a computer don't have to worry about someone finding their old data.

"Computer people are sometimes concerned about data that stays in the computer, but the engineers use a tool to delete anything that's left," McPherson said.

The ARC Broward electronic waste recycling facility is at 10250 NW 53rd St. Call 954-577-4160.

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