COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE ELECTRONIC WASTE RECYCLING LAW IN NEW YORK CITY

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Abstract

The New York State Electronic Equipment Recycling and Reuse Act took effect on April 1st, 2011, requiring manufacturers of electronic equipment and retailers to accept back items for collection, handling and recycling. This law also requires manufacturers to educate consumers on their electronic waste acceptance programs. This thesis does not address so much the necessity of e-waste recycling, which has already been heavily documented, but rather the potential and limitations to the electronic waste recycling law in New York State as it applies to the city of New York, as the law is phased in from April 2011 to January 2015.

Unlike some state electronic waste bills, the New York State law does not specify in any level of detail how the residential ban should be implemented at the local level, nor does it require municipalities to bear any onus for collection or public education. As an extended producer responsibility bill, the New York State law puts sole responsibility on the manufacturers to handle the collection and recycling or reuse of electronic waste, along with financing and implementing a campaign for public education.

More critical is the nature of the law itself. Since manufacturer quotas in New York State are state wide with no geographical requirements, manufacturers have been able to meet their quotas by collecting in areas outside of New York City, where collection can be cheaper, more efficient and convenient. On the consumer end in New York City currently, the process to recycle electronic waste is non-systematic and ad-hoc. However, New York City is unique due to the large number of non-profit and community organizations that are actively involved in electronic waste collection.

This thesis aims to address two primary research questions. First, what challenges may arise in the application of the New York State electronic waste recycling law at the local level in New York City? And second, how might New York City take advantage of existing community-based organizations with electronic waste recycling activities to more effectively collect and recycle electronic waste, as well as educate residents and businesses?