Sidney Herald

WEDNESDAY
APRIL 20, 2005
97th year, No. 32
Sidney, Montana
www.sidneyherald.com
75 CENTS

E-cycling meeting set for Wednesday

BY ELLEN ROBINSON
SIDNEY HERALD

Everyone interested in learning about properly disposing of electronic products which contain hazardous toxins, or e-cycling, is invited to a community informational Wednesday (today), 7 p.m. at the tech transfer room at the USDA-ARS Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory, Sidney.

With the national observation of Earth Day on Friday, the timely informational is designed to educate the public on the environmental hazards associated with e-waste and how to safely dispose of those items. A community wide e-cycling event is being planned for late June.

All citizens concerned with the future safety of the community in both a public health standpoint and an environmental standpoint are encouraged to participate.

E-waste is currently the fastest growing segment of the nation's waste stream. It's estimated that in the next few years about 250 million computers will be disposed of, and currently 130 million cell phones are disposed of each year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

"We are taking proactive steps with e-waste in the anticipation of new national regulations which will be soon upon us. In our disposing of our own e-waste in an environmentally friendly way, we decided this is something the whole community should be aware of," Jackie Couture, ARS safety specialist, said.

Electronics contain toxins such as lead, mercury, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, cyanide, beryllium, selenium and radioactives like Cobalt-60. As more electronics become obsolete, more toxins are being disposed of in the landfills and have been known to contaminate the water tables as a result of leakage from unlined landfills.

Televisions contain approximately 10 pounds of lead, and computer monitors contain about 4 pounds of lead. Lead is a particular concern for children because it has been linked to growth and thinking impairment, even in small quantities.

"When you realize there are some radioactive materials and other toxins like lead, mercury and arsenic in electronics that are being dumped into our landfills, it's a big concern, especially when you think about the future," Couture said. "The growing numbers of these electronics being disposed of with all of these toxins inside concerns me both as a mom and as a safety specialist."

Tatoonie Electronic Systems Inc. will give a presentation, and Loni Hanka, Montana Department of Environmental Quality recycling and marketing development director and Russ Huotari, Richland County public works director, will give input from the county and state's perspective on e-cycling.

Tatooine, named after Luke Skywalker's home planet in Star Wars where broken-down droids were fixed and resold, recycles what can be salvaged, resells e-cycled items at a discount, and properly disposes of what can't be salvaged.

"I really like this company because of the recycling element. When people upgrade electronics, not everything they throw away is broken, and I really like the idea of re-using what we can," Couture said. "The fewer of these items containing these very dangerous toxins going into the landfill the better."

Richland County Local Emergency Planning Commission, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program and the Community Emergency Response Team along with ARS are hosting the community wide event.

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'E-rase Your E-waste' project plans two-day event in area

BY ELLEN ROBINSON
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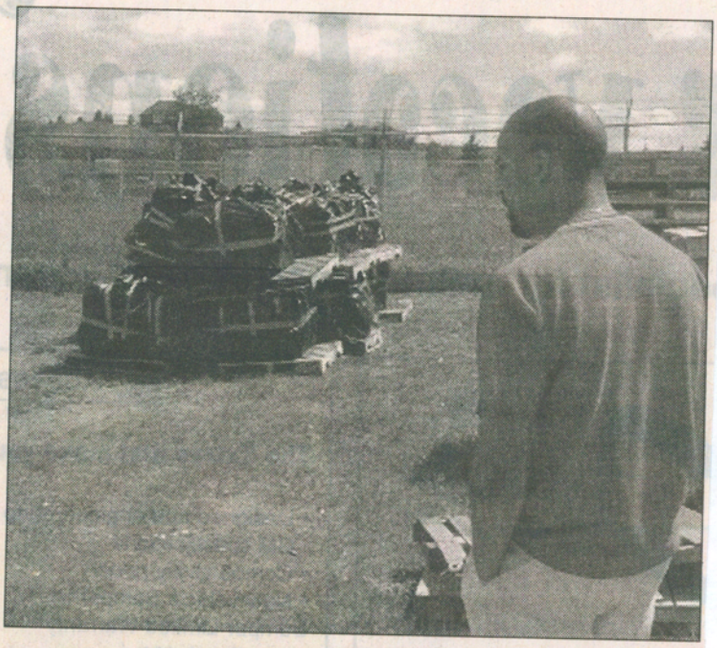

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Northern Plains Agriculture Research Laboratory Information Technology Specialist Kevin Dahl looks over packing gaylords and bundled e-waste during a tour of Tatooine Inc. in Cheyenne, Wyo. Tatooine is the recycler for Sidney's community-wide e-cycling event Friday and Saturday.

"E-rase Your E-waste," the first community-wide recycling event for office equipment and other specified electronic equipment, is a collaborative effort to take a progressive step in reducing the amount of toxic agents from "e-waste" entering the landfill.

The event, scheduled for Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., is sponsored by USDA-ARS Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory, Richland County Local Emergency Planning Committee, Retired Seniors Volunteer Program, and the Community Emergency Response Team.

The two-day event will be held at the ag research laboratory, 1500 N. Central Ave., Sidney.

Those with large amounts of items to recycle are encouraged, but not required, to schedule a time on Friday for disposal to help expedite processing by calling Jackie Couture, NPARL safety specialist, at 433-2020.

"Though appointments aren't required, making appointments for larger amounts will help with processing the items. We want to stress that people are free to bring their items either day and don't have to have an appointment," Couture said.

"E-waste" eligible for recycling includes computers and components, cell phones, TVs, fax machines, copiers, VCRs, stereos, and certain specialized equipment used in law enforcement, the medical industry, manufacturing, and in the oilfield. Microwaves are acceptable, but other appliances are not. Contact Couture before the event with any questions about eligible items or other details.

With "e-waste" as the fastest growing segment of the nation's waste, area officials have organized this event to locally curb growing piles of "e-waste" containing many dangerous toxins in the Richland County landfill.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 2 million tons of electronic equipment laden with hazardous chemicals are disposed of each year. Nationally, approximately 250 million computers will become obsolete within the next five years, and 130 million mobile phones become obsolete every year.

These items, along with other electronic equipment, contain significant amounts of toxic substances, including leaded glass, mercury, cyanide, arsenic, cadmium, beryllium, nickel, zinc and brominated flame retardants.

For example, lead, which is linked to physical and mental impairment in children, can be found in high amounts in televisions and computers. Televisions contain approximately 10 pounds of lead, and computers contain about 4 pounds.

When disposing items containing dangerous chemicals in landfills, toxins from electronics have the potential of irrevocably contaminating ground water, possibly jeopardizing public and environmental health of the area.

The idea for the event spawned from Couture's concern for proper disposal of ARS's ever-growing pile of obsolete electronic equipment.

"When I was trying to figure out how to properly dispose of our electronic waste here at ARS, it was enough quantity that I didn't feel comfortable just sending it to the landfill," Couture said. "Then I started thinking about the amount of 'e-waste' in our community that might potentially go into the landfill. That was the motivation for making this a community-wide event. Now people have the opportunity to do their part to properly dispose of these items."

In her research for environmentally safe solutions, she found a company specializing in "e-cycling" out of Cheyenne, Wyo.

Tatoonie Electronic Systems, named after Luke Skywalker's home planet in Star Wars, where broken-down spaceships and droids were recycled, specializes in recycling what can be salvaged, re-selling recycled electronics at a discount, and properly disposing of the unsalvageable electronics.

"I really like the recycling element of this company because I really like the idea of re-using what we can. The less items containing these dangerous toxins entering our landfill here, the better," Couture said.

The cost will be a flat rate of 40 cents per pound, which is half of the price charged in most locations. Though there are no current federal or state regulations concerning the proper disposal of "e-waste," the event organizers feel taking progressive steps will better prepare Richland County for the possibility of future regulations, which are already a reality in neighboring states.

E-rase your E-waste event brings in four tons of products

More than four tons of electronic waste products were collected during the community-wide "E-rase your E-waste" event held in Sidney Friday and Saturday.

Altogether 93 computers and 73 monitors were recycled during the two-day event, along with 42 printers, six fax machines, six slide projectors, five electric typewriters, four television sets, three microwaves, three copiers, two scanners, a VCR and an old turntable, according to organizers. Also included in the mix were assorted keyboards and other smaller computer components, scientific scales, and even an old DNA gene sequencing unit.

"The response from the community was great," Disaster and Emergency Service Coordinator Butch Renders said. "Because there was a cost involved, we really weren't expecting this big of a response. We want to extend our sincere thanks to all those individuals, businesses and organizations who participated."

Renders and Jackie Couture, health and safety officer with the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Sidney, are members of the Richland County Local Emergency Planning Committee, one of the organizers of the event. Other organizers included the USDA-ARS Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory, which hosted the two-day event, and the Richland County Retired Seniors Volunteer Program and the local Community Emergency Response Team, both of which helped with preparations as well as providing volunteers to aid in the actual collection effort.

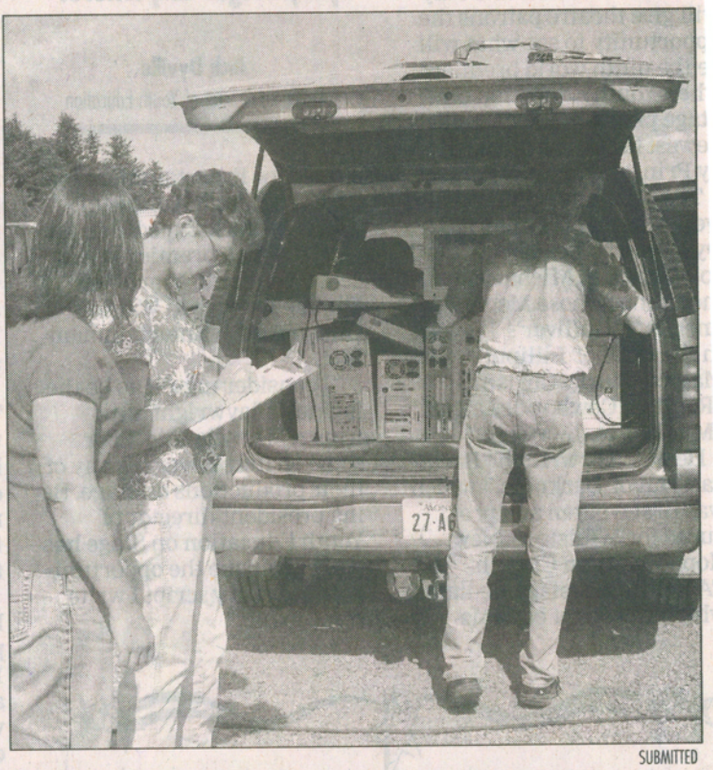
Couture said she, too, was both surprised and pleased with the public response. She also reported that the more than two dozen participants came from as far away as Froid and Williston, N.D., as well as from the Lambert and Sidney areas, the bulk of them on Friday. Local businesses and organizations were also represented, she noted, even a local church.

"We want to thank Sidney Health Center, 1st Bank, Pella Lutheran Church, the Mon-Dak Heritage Center and the county for joining in the event," Couture said. "We also want to thank Dick Jensen and ROI for their participation and words of encouragement for this recycling effort."

Officials with Tatooine Electronic Systems Inc., the e-cycler for the event, said they also felt the event was a success. Company President Jeff Stump noted he had reservations initially about the community collection since previous efforts his company has been involved with have all had grant funding to cover costs for participants. However, the enthusiasm shown by organizers and the involvement of several community agencies and organizations convinced him to participate, he said, adding that he was also pleasantly surprised at the response, which fell within collection ranges seen for similarly sized communities where there were no charges for participants.

"It really demonstrated that people in this area recognize the importance of keeping these dangerous materials out of our local landfill," Couture said.

Couture and Renders noted local officials are hoping to hold more e-waste recycling efforts in the future and are currently exploring opportunities through grants or other programs that would allow participants to recycle their obsolete electronic items free of charge. Officials are also studying how often and where to hold such events in the future.



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First Bank employees fill out the certification paperwork as Tatooine Electronic Systems Inc. representatives unload their outdated computer equipment for recycling. More than 90 computers and 70 monitors were "e-cycled" during the two-day "E-rase Your E-waste" event Friday and Saturday.