



E-waste group has familiar goals, familiar hurdle

By: Joe Truini

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It's like deja-NEPSI all over again. The bipartisan Congressional E-Waste Working Group brought together stakeholders in Washington Sept. 13 in hopes of starting up a dialogue to look at developing and financing a national electronics collection and recycling program.

"The problem E-Waste poses to the environment and our health is clear and it is encouraging that many groups are actively working toward a solution," said Rep. Mike Thompson, D-Calif. "However, rather than having a patchwork of state regulations and individual company policies, a federal solution may be a more effective approach." Reps. Mary Bono, R.-Calif., Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y., and Zack Wamp, RTenn., joined Thompson in bringing the stakeholders together.

The congressional dialogue has the same goal as the National Electronics Product Stewardship Initiative. NEPSI stakeholders met for four years, starting in June 2001, to try and develop an electronics collection, reuse and recycling system that would include a viable financing mechanism. The effort fizzled out, officially ending in April 2005, without reaching a consensus. The main stumbling block was determining who would finance a national system.

But things have changed since that dialogue, said Parker Brugge, senior director and environmental counsel for the Consumer Electronics Association.

Four states - California, Maine, Maryland

and Washington - have passed legislation to implement their own electronic waste programs. And each program is different, making it more expensive and difficult for electronics manufacturers and retailers to comply.

"I think a lot of the stakeholders sitting around the room didn't come right out and say this, [but] they're now looking at this issue as, 'Let's look for a solution we can live with,' as opposed to looking for a solution that works best for us," Brugge said. "It's really costing the industry a lot of money."

But one thing remains at the heart of the matter.

"I'm going to share a secret with you - the financing issue is still a major sticking point," Brugge said. "We need to come to an agreement on that issue before we can move forward on anything."

The stakeholders plan to meet again next month, perhaps in mid-October, he said. Those that would be most impacted by financing a national recycling program, such as manufacturers and retailers, likely will get together informally before the next meeting to take a look at some of the options, he said.

"We have a lot of homework to do between now and then," Brugge said.

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