

# Recycling state's toxic waste involves shipping it overseas

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

In the soft morning light, the silver-gray mountain of electronic trash did not look especially hazardous. But it was.



Inside that massive rubble of technology, with its V-shaped canyons of printers and keyboards and its fin-like ridges of fax machines and coffee makers, was enough toxic material – including lead, cadmium and brominated flame retardants – to poison California watersheds for centuries and sow disease in humans.

“This is the problem,” said Jim Taggart, president of ECS Refining in Santa Clara, where the e-waste was waiting to be safely recycled. “This is the material that most people are exporting. They’ll get paid 5 to 10 cents a pound for shoving it in a container and shipping it overseas.”

Five years after California launched an ambitious effort to control pollution from electronic waste, much of our e-waste is being shipped overseas, where it is contributing to a legacy of pollution and disease that would not be tolerated in this state, a Bee investigation has found.

Domestically, California’s program is doing just what officials intended: It has outlawed e-waste from landfills and jump-started a multimillion-dollar state industry to recycle televisions, computer monitors and other video display devices, paid for with public money.

But there is a blind spot: The program provides no money for anything else, meaning large volumes of low-value, hazardous

electronic waste that are difficult to recycle at a profit in California are instead being exported, a consequence the state did not anticipate. Much of it is flowing to developing nations where it is picked apart by workers exposed to a high-tech cocktail of contamination.

“Most people just don’t know what’s happening to their material when it’s dropped off,” said Taggart, one of the state’s leading e-waste recyclers. “If they knew, they wouldn’t be dropping it off.”

Nearly all TVs and monitors are recycled – at least initially – in California. That is not true for the towering mountains of other electronic products sold in the state.

**Read the whole story**