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World Reuse, Repair and Recycling Association

Robin Ingenthron, president of American Retroworks Inc. and founder of Vermont's Good Point Recycling company, announced a multi-continental and international agreement today to form a new Association of export buyers and sellers to respond to worldwide demand for used goods such as electronics without turning those export markets into dumping grounds for toxic junk. The founding members of the cooperative include USA's American Retroworks, Cochise County Learning Action Coalition, staff from University of California at Davis, and will include international member companies representing refurbishment markets in Hong Kong, Philippines, Egypt, Eastern Europe, and South America.

The first goal of the **World Reuse, Repair, Recycling Association** will be to establish agreed upon quality standards for monitors, televisions, and other repair-and-reuse items exported for repair from the USA. Association members will pool their resources to offer a "cleaner" option to meet global demand, and cooperatively leverage demand for their goods to demand environmental improvements for both USA recycling companies and overseas refurbishing companies. By establishing minimum standards for exports, Association members hope to improve environmental standards in importing countries while still keeping USA recycling costs affordable to residents, who are contributing the fastest growing portion of electronic scrap.

The organization will also promote domestic recycling of scrap such as leaded CRT glass and gold circuitry.

"Several companies like American Retroworks Inc. tried to establish a higher exporting standard to meet the strong legitimate demand for working and repairable monitors and TVs overseas. I think many of us found we didn't have enough material to dictate the terms. Some of us have tried raising our prices on generators, while others have lowered their export standards to compete with low-ball bids.

"There is a general feeling that advocates opposed to scrap exporting have attacked everyone with a broad brush. Our organization will make use of market forces rather than trying to deny them."

According to Ingenthron, the need for the cooperative became apparent when his company was approached by several desperate refurbishing companies in Southeast Asia. "There is a vibrant and strong demand for 50,000 CRT tubes per month," Ingenthron explained. "These companies are producing digital televisions with on-board DVD, games, and input jacks for either computer or television display. But they say some of their sources in the USA are sending junk monitors along with the good tubes, as Toxics Along for the Ride."

In the beginning, many refurbishers found it acceptable to take in one bad tube for each 2 good tubes they imported. However, over time, the good tubes are distributed far and wide, but the junk tubes built up into bigger piles around the plant. This not only attracted regulators and made for bad business, it also threatens to spoil the environment. According to the US EPA, a single bad monitor can bear 3-4 pounds of lead, a neurotoxin.

This puts companies like American Retroworks Inc., which pays approximately 2000 per week to destroy and recycle the bad tubes. When the reputable companies try to pass those recycling costs on to suppliers, it's difficult to explain what's ok to export and what's not.

Meanwhile, the foreign companies cannot now afford to cut off their USA suppliers. "50,000 tubes per month is a huge demand. They are afraid they can't get that many tubes if they buy only from small, honest vendors," said Ingenthron. "That's when the idea of a supply-and-demand cooperative came up."

During a visit to American Retroworks Inc. in July, Mr. Frank Moy of Hong Kong came with film of the manufacturing process and convinced Ingenthron that the demand for the tubes was real. However, Mr. Moy said TAR had made it increasingly difficult to grow and succeed. "in the end, we were getting console TVs, copy machines, Apple macintosh... some of the loads were a disaster" said Moy.

Nessrin Omar of Egypt also visited American Retroworks help for her computer business in Egypt. "We were sent some computers we had real problems with, and couldn't get our calls returned. Some USA companies use small importers like us just to sweep the junk out of their closets. We aren't large enough to threaten to affect their marketing if we boycott, they'll find another small importer when they need to. A coop will help us unite and offer inspection.

American Retroworks Inc. received visitors from Ghana, Bolivia, Haiti, Lithuania, Russia, Egypt, Pakistan and China in the past 6 months. All of the importers complained of the same thing – junk TVs and monitors mixed in among the repairable units. "To have all of these countries come visit our tiny two-bit operation in Middlebury, Vermont, showed me just how desperate the situation has become," said Ingenthron.

In China, the government has declared its intention to stop imports of used equipment altogether. It may be too late to save that industry, which is a shame, according to Ingenthron. "We will still have Singapore, Philippines, South Korea, and Malaysia, but a lot of people in China are going to go without internet access, without TV, or without a job. The pendulum will swing against reuse in other countries, too, if the USA can't meet the demand without abusing it."

What drives Toxics Along for the Ride is the expense of recycling bad units. A scratched or damaged or obsolete CRT tube costs an American processor between \$5-15 to recycle. On a load of 1000 monitors, 400 bad ones cost more to recycle than the other 600 cost to ship. The temptation to ship American pollution to repair markets is undeniable.

Membership in the **World Reuse, Repair and Recycling Association** is open to any electronics importer or exporter. Members will be required to provide data for due diligence, such as CRT Glass recycling records (the "CRT Glass Test"), records for recycling of bad computers, and must agree to document each monitor sold overseas individually by make, model, serial number, voltage, year and country of manufacture, and condition. Importers will be able to inspect shipments electronically before accepting them, and can veto any pallet if it contains brands or years not acceptable for repair. NESDA members may be invited to inspect and photograph outgoing loads.

If there is a dispute, coop membership fees will pay for inspection and arbitrage. If the export is in bad faith, the member will be excluded from the Association. This is what makes the organization fundamentally different from other international associations. "In other organizations, if you pay the membership fee, you are in like Flynn, no matter what your export behavior. There are a lot of "recycler" organizations which have members who don't recycle, they pass the buck and dump, then flash EPA ID numbers and association memberships like a "get out of jail free" card.

The organization will also provide an initial inspection of overseas buyers. It is not open to brokers who simply sell mixed loads into flea markets and play the percentages. A large number of exporters accept anything and simply gamble that enough of the USA junk will be repairable to pay for the shipping. What happens to the remainder is not on their property and not their concern.

The Cooperative will also tackle difficult-diligence recyclables such as printed circuit boards and gold chips.

Free membership will be offered in the first year to board of directors and companies offering unique capabilities and expertise, upon vote of the founders.

WRRRA anticipates it will be funded through memberships. For example, companies will be may be charged membership for \$125.00 per year, when they sign a membership agreement. Discounts will be provided to companies which also show membership in one of the following organizations:

NRC
ISRI
IAER
Earthworks (Mineral Policy Center)
Mineral Policy Institute

However, organizations will be offered a free one year membership if they join the WRRRA before the end of 2004. After that period, a vote of the full membership will decide the annual dues.

For more information about how to qualify for membership in the WRRRA, send email to

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