

Recycling fees eyed for TVs, laptops

Ontario plan to keep electronics out of dump

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The price of televisions and computers may be about to go up – not due to the latest features but because of a government plan to recycle electronic waste.

Recycling fees of \$10 for TVs and up to \$13 for computers would be charged on all new sales under the proposal being given to Ontario's environment minister for approval today.

"We have a choice as a society. We can either let it all wind up in a landfill site ... or we're going to keep this stuff, as much as possible, out of landfills and I really think that's what recycling and reusing is all about," Environment Minister John Gerretsen said in an interview last night.

Last year, the province asked Waste Diversion Ontario to come up with a way to reduce the tens of thousands of tonnes of electronics being dumped in landfills every year, which wastes valuable resources and unsafely disposes of toxic components.

What they've come up with is a \$62 million plan.

It would see 650 depots open across the province – nearly four times the number there are now – where people can drop off used electronics to have them recycled.

The \$62 million bill is broken into per-item fees that would be charged directly to the manufacturer or first importer of the specified electronics. It's left up to them to decide how they want to pay for it: add the fee to the consumer's bill – as is done in other provinces – increase prices or absorb the cost.

Proposed fees are:

- \$2.14 for a laptop computer, \$13.44 for a desktop computer and \$12.03 for a monitor.
- \$5.05 for a printer, and 32 cents for computer accessories like a mouse or keyboard.
- \$10.07 for a television.

Right now, only 27 per cent of these products are recycled in Ontario. Under the plan, that number is expected to rise to 43 per cent in the first year and to 61 per cent by the fifth year, said Glenda Gies, executive director of Waste Diversion Ontario.

The plan calls for adding new products, such as cellphones, cameras and radios, in the future.

"It's not about a tax grab as the Tories would like to have you believe," Gerretsen said referring to criticism from the Progressive Conservatives that this proposal, and a plan to create a fee-based tire recycling program, are nothing but a way to force people to give the government more money.

"It's about being responsible and making producers more responsible for the materials they produce," Gerretsen said.

If the program is approved, Ontario Electronic Stewardship, a non-profit corporation established by manufacturers, retailers and other stakeholders will collect the fees and publicly show how the money is being used to recycle the products, Gies said.

Provinces in Western Canada charge \$15 to \$45 for televisions, \$5 to \$22 for computers and \$8 for printers. In those provinces, the industry has opted to use visible fees tacked on to the purchase price.

That's also how such programs are started in the European Union where it serves to educate consumers about the environmental costs of what they're buying.

"There's going to be a cost involved but as to who ultimately pays for it, whether it's the producer, the retailers or the consumers ... remains to be seen. I look forward to getting their plan and taking it from there," Gerretsen said.

He will post the plan on the environmental bill of rights website for public comments and said he hopes legislation will be introduced within a few months. Once passed, the electronics industry would be given at least eight months to prepare before the fees take effect, according to the proposal.

Even if fees do trickle down to consumers, Gerretsen said he thinks they're ready for it.

"We're putting way too much of the stuff that we use from time to time in landfills and we should be recycling and reusing a lot more and that's what all these programs are all about," he said.

As it stands now, many people fill their basements or attics with their old electronics because they know they shouldn't throw them in the trash but don't know what else to do with them.

"I've got two or three old television sets, computer screens, fax machines and all this stuff," he said.

There are already some electronic recycling programs underway in Ontario where companies take back the products they sell or others take them apart and recycle or reuse the individual pieces.

"But they're all individual efforts by different people who want to do the right thing so I would hope that the plan ... is more all-encompassing," Gerretsen said.

The latest numbers show Ontario residents recycle 38 per cent of their waste – an improvement over previous years – but still nowhere near the provincial goal of diverting 60 per cent of garbage from landfill.