

Weird Waste Day in Mt. Airy: A Recycling Bonanza

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Residents brought tons of electronic gear to Valley Green Bank for recycling during Mt. Airy's Weird Waste Day. (Photo by Jennifer Reed)

Last Saturday, the Mt. Airy Business Association and Valley Green Bank hosted Weird Waste Day (WWD) on the bank's Mt. Airy parking lot.

WWD's purpose was to collect all those electronic items stored away in basements, attics and garages, and have them dismantled by the Institution Recycling Network (IRN) for reuse or proper disposal.

"This is both awesome and terrifying!" said Lee Carpenter, a Mt. Airy resident, while looking over the small mountains of recyclables. "It's like a mini landfill! I brought cell phones, possibly the world's first laptop and some batteries totaling 23 pounds. We didn't bring our behemoth air conditioner because we couldn't get it out of our basement."

Ken Weinstein, owner of the Trolley Car Diner, and his two sons, Evan and Noah, brought a printer, cell phone chargers, old cell phones, and a year's worth of batteries. "It's incredible – absolutely amazing what's been recycled here today," Weinstein said.

Evan Weinstein, an avid recycler according to his father, is also a member of the Germantown Friends' Environmental Action Club and is planning a recycling theme for his bar mitzvah project.

At 3 p.m., only two hours after WWD started, there were 4.5 tons of electronics boxed and baled.

"The community outpouring is amazing," said Leslie Seitchik, of Valley Green Bank.

"Every time we do an event we get more and more," said Ann King-Musza, of IRN. "Everyone that comes and sees the event is shocked by what a really enormous issue this is. It's huge! People don't bring one thing – they clean out their basement. These items have been laying around for years and they don't know what to do with them."

Kim Miller, president of MABA and organizer of the event, said that WWD was also about raising community awareness.

"At the beginning of the day we were overwhelmed," Miller said. "We had two people working the scales and couldn't keep up. People waited in line for 45 minutes and gladly paid us 32 cents per pound to get rid of their stuff in a responsible way."

All around the city, Weird Waste Days have been collecting tons of electronics that would have made their way into landfills, where many of these household items then seep toxic chemicals into our soil and water supply. Older televisions and PCs can contain as much as four pounds of lead with newer versions having close to two pounds.

Mercury, cadmium and brominated flame retardants are other "substances of concern" to the EPA, and are present in various parts of most electronic devices and need to be dealt with properly.

While keeping dangerous chemicals out of our landfill is important, so is reusing the valuable components in many of these outdated gadgets. For instance, cell phones have a number of different metals in them that can be recycled, such as copper, gold, silver and palladium.

According to a U.S. Geological Survey, if we recycled 100 million cell phones, 3.4 metric tons of gold could be recovered. That sounds like a lot of cell phones, but last year between 70.6 million and 116.5 million cell phones became unwanted or obsolete and only 10 percent were recycled.

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What can you recycle at a Weird Waste Day? Televisions, computers, hard drives, monitors, VCRs, radios, video games, transformers, batteries – anything and everything “electronic,” even air conditioners.

Bring all your old cell phones, free of charge. Don’t bring what they call “white goods,” which are fridges, freezers, washing machines and dishwashers. They can be recycled elsewhere. Check www.earth911.com for details on these and other less common recyclable items.

Don’t worry, if you missed this WWD or you just didn’t have help this time to lug up that behemoth air conditioner, there’s another one coming up on Nov. 14 at the John Story Jenks Elementary School.

The times have yet to be determined, so please look in the Local’s “This Week” column or www.greeninchestnuthill.blogspot.com for the details. As always, contact me at ecologic.chlocal@gmail.com.