

# 'White goods': The best way to get rid of appliances

BY ERIN ANDERSON

Special to the Record-Eagle

Where do home appliances go when they die? All too often the answer is an appliance graveyard. Typically, these can be found nestled in the woods, at the bottom of a ravine, or even in someone's backyard. This may seem an appropriate final resting place to some; however, the majority of the time, this method of disposal is not only irresponsible, it's illegal.

So what is the right way to dispose of household appliances such as washers, dryers, air conditioners, refrigerators, stoves, furnaces, sinks and water heaters, to name some — items commonly labeled "white goods" since most originally came in white. And why is their responsible removal a major concern?

Each year, hundreds of children are hurt or killed playing in and around discarded appliances. Sharp metal, rusted hinges and difficult-to-open doors make leaving these items laying in accessible places an invitation for disaster.

And then there are the effects the chemicals and components of these white goods have on the environment. For example, appliances like refrigerators and freezers contain Freon, a material made up of the ozone-depleting agents chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

CFCs are also found in many other appliances, such as the majority of air conditioners and heat pumps.

Federal guidelines prohibit the dumping of Freon-containing appliances due to leakage and contamination problems. Although Freon is reason enough to prohibit the haphazard disposal of these items, it is by no means the only danger lurking in white goods.

A host of other chemicals and contaminants also exist. For example, even something which seems as harmless as an old dryer switch probably contains mercury, an almost certain cancer-causing agent. Virtually any electric transformer or capacitor made before the 1970s is going to house some PCBs.

The government mandates that capacitors containing PCBs must be removed from appliances before recycling or landfill disposal.

As with nearly all white good regulations, this rule, itself, is clear cut; however, just how the consumer is to go about following it is not.

Unfortunately, federal and state governments carefully regulate what you cannot do with your old appliances without offering many

viable suggestions for what you can. Unlike China and much of Europe, there are no federal programs in the United States to assist consumers with the disposal of "white goods."

Many local counties, including Grand Traverse County, classify white goods under the stipulations of their solid waste ordinance and, therefore, "dumping" them is prohibited.

To avoid a hefty fine and endangering the environment, where do you turn? Randy Smith, Resource Recovery Manager for Grand Traverse County, suggested two possible options. The first is re-use. Many appliances, particularly those that do not contain Freon, can be refurbished if necessary and resold. In fact, most of these machines are perfectly suited for recycling.

Odom Reusable Building Materials in Traverse City, for example, will accept dishwashers, dryers, hot water heaters and Freon-free appliances for resale, as well as give you store credit in return for your drop-off. Odom also takes sinks, vanities, bathtubs and many other larger home products. For a fee, they will also pick up such items in Traverse City, Elk Rapids, Kingsley and on Old Mission Peninsula.

For a \$10 fee, B&T Appliance of Traverse City will accept certain non-Freon items worth salvaging.

The second option is to

like Integrity Iron and Metal or Traverse Bay Recycling will then keep the drained appliances for salvageable metal, plastic and glass. Both facilities also accept Freon-free appliances. Repair shops will often remove the Freon and issue an EPA approval sticker, confirming that all hazardous chemicals have been emptied, after which you can haul your appliance to a landfill or other disposal site yourself.

Of course, if you choose to dump it yourself, you'll pay not only for the transportation to the landfill, but according to Michigan state law, you'll also pay the waste disposal site for the privilege of actually dumping it.

Also, many appliance stores will offer to take your old machines off your hands when you purchase a new one from them.

Max's Service in Traverse City, for instance, accepts used appliances upon delivery of your new machine for a fee of \$45. They then turn the

implemented, the responsibility and burden lies with individual consumers to get involved, do some research and make informed choices that benefit both themselves and the planet. The good news is that consumers have the power to make conscientious decisions that will make both their own lives, and those of future generations, safer and healthier.

Erin Anderson is a local freelance writer and author.



Odom Reusable Building Materials in Traverse City takes "white goods" as well as other home materials. Bruce Odom says not only is it a good way for people to recycle it is an affordable way for others who are building or remodeling on a budget. Their services include picking up items and deconstructing homes, which Odom says can save up to 80 percent of materials going to a landfill.



take your appliances to a refrigerator repair shop or scrap facility certified to perform the complex process of removing Freon. Typically, the charge for this service runs between \$20 and \$30.

A scrap/recycling business

appliances over to B&T Appliance, or other similar facilities, for refurbishing and recycling.

In the end, this is both good and bad news. The bad news is that until a more comprehensive system for white goods disposal can be

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