

Action Alert to Save Producer Responsibility from Attack by the US Trade Rep.

Don't Trade Away our Health and the Environment!

Your immediate assistance is needed to defend an important new initiative that will help protect environmental health and safety by phasing out persistent, bio-accumulative toxics and by cleaning up the life cycle of computer manufacturing and other electronic and electrical products.

This new "take-back" Directive, developed by the European Commission, focuses on Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and is designed to address the growing piles of electronic junk. Besides phasing out toxic chemicals, the directive will require producers of electronic and electrical equipment to assume financial and legal responsibility for their products throughout their entire life cycle; it also establishes a framework for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

However, the US Trade Representative (USTR) -- at the request of the American Electronics Association (AEA), the largest trade association of the electronics industry with more than 3000 members -- is launching a new lobbying attack on the WEEE Directive.

The AEA is using international trade law as a weapon to dictate global health and environmental policy to protect the economic interests of its members (Microsoft, Intel, IBM, Motorola, etc.). In a 15 page legal position paper, the AEA asserts the proposed phase-out of the listed persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic materials -- lead, mercury, cadmium, hexavalent chromium and halogenated flame retardants -- and the provision requiring at least 5% recycled plastics in electronic and electrical products are "illegal" and violate World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.

Rather than working to defend and protect our health and environment, the USTR staff is supporting the AEA's position in discussions with other US and international agencies.

European NGOs such as the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), ANPED (the Northern Alliance for Sustainability) and other environmental health and consumer organizations in Europe have asked us to help protect the WEEE Directive. By supporting their initiative, we are fighting for improved global standards for everyone. If adopted in Europe, this Directive will help our efforts for similar legislation in the US to reduce toxics and promote clean production. It is crucial that US activists involved in toxics, waste, recycling, incineration, corporate accountability, consumer advocacy, international trade, human rights and/or democracy issues make our voices heard before the US government adopts the myopic views of the U.S. computer industry on these important environmental issues.

TAKE ACTION. Time is of the essence. With the intensive lobbying efforts of the electronics industry, the US is formulating its position to oppose this directive. Please take a few moments to fax or send a letter on your own letterhead to Vice-President Gore and tell him to bring an immediate halt to the USTR's lobbying activities. You can use the enclosed text as a model. Please also send (or e-mail) a copy to Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (svtc@igc.org or fax 408-287-6771). We will add your name to the action alert on our website. We may also publish ads in national media. Thanks very much for your support.

For additional background on this issue:

****find a copy of the letter to the European Commission**