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Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition Urges Gore to Change U.S. Trade Stance on EU E-Waste and Computer Recycling.

News Editors/High Tech & Environment Writers

SAN JOSE, Calif. --(BUSINESS WIRE)--May 17, 2000

The Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition is supporting Capitol Hill efforts to enlist Vice President Al Gore in ending U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) opposition to a European Union (EU) environmental initiative designed to encourage the recycling of computers and phasing out the use of toxic chemicals in the production of computers.

The Coalition is supporting the efforts of U.S. Reps. George Miller (D-CA), Bernard Sanders (D-VT) and U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-MN), who, in a May 16th letter, encouraged Vice President Al Gore to "intervene to put an immediate stop to the USTR's lobbying efforts" in Europe at the bidding of U.S. electronic industry giants. The draft EU Directive on Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) is designed to address the growing problem of "e-waste" (pollution associated with obsolete electronic equipment and computers) and will help protect environmental health and safety on both sides of the Atlantic by phasing out toxic chemicals and promoting recycling.

"The USTR has no right to lobby on behalf of major corporations against the interests of the American public," said Ted Smith, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. "We are offended that the U.S. Trade Representative and the American Electronics Association (AEA) are using the World Trade Organization (WTO) to undermine important and beneficial environmental initiatives. We have an enormous problem with the growing piles of e-waste throughout the U.S., and our government needs to be forging solutions here rather than fighting against important international environmental initiatives."

A third of a billion computers will become obsolete in the next five years and fewer than 10 percent of the high-tech machines are now recycled. While 90 percent of computer contents could be recycled, only about 6 percent of abandoned computers were recycled in 1998, according to SVTC research. Out of the 1,000 materials that go into computers, hundreds -- including chlorinated and brominated substances, metals, gases, acids and plastic additives -- are highly toxic. A recent SVTC survey of 21 computer manufacturers (<http://www.svtc.org/cleancc/99reportcard.htm>) ranked the companies for hazardous materials use policies, product upgradability and take-back practices for computers. Among other things, the Coalition's study concluded that there is a distinct lack of information given to North American consumers about the toxic content of "obsolete" computers or the recycling or disposal options for out of date computers.

"We understand that USTR has lobbied on behalf of the electronics industry to oppose the draft European Commission Directive," stated the letter from Miller, Sanders, and Wellstone. The trio of federal lawmakers also expressed additional concerns about the USTR setting US policy behind closed doors with industry executives. In a letter sent to Vice President Gore earlier this year, hundreds of health and environmental groups expressed similar concerns. For details see <http://www.svtc.org/cleancc/wseeustr.htm>. The Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (SVTC) is a diverse grassroots nonprofit organization consisting of environmental and neighborhood groups, labor unions, public health leaders, people affected by toxic exposure and others. SVTC's core values include a commitment to the practice of social justice and multiracial democracy. Visit the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition on the web at <http://www.svtc.org>.

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