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# **Electronic Waste: Strengthening the Role of the Federal Government in Encouraging Recycling and Reuse**

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# Outline of Presentation

- What GAO was asked to examine
- How GAO conducted this study
- Principle Findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

## **GAO Was Asked to:**

- (1) Summarize existing information on the volumes of, and problems associated with, used electronics;
- (2) Examine the factors affecting the nation's ability to recycle and reuse these products; and
- (3) Examine federal efforts to encourage recycling and reuse of used electronics.

**Senators Jeffords (I-VT), Thune (R-SD), Boxer (D-CA), Chaffee (R-RI), Snowe (R-ME), Talent (R-MO), and Wyden (D-OR) requested this study.**

## How GAO Conducted This Study

- Surveyed NEPSI participants; obtained 86% response rate
- Conducted site visits and interviews in California, Maine, Massachusetts, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington
- Interviewed officials from OEMs, recyclers, trade organizations, non-profit organizations, and environmental advocacy groups.
- Interviewed EPA and OFEE officials responsible for implementation of FEC, EPEAT, and Plug-In to eCycling programs.
- Analyzed data from award-winning FEC participants, such as BPA, when available.

# Factors Affecting Recycling & Reuse

## Economic Factors

- **Cost**: Consumers generally pay fees to recycling used electronics
- **Convenience**: Consumers often must travel substantial distances to recycling & reuse facilities

## Regulatory Factors

- **Disposal**: Landfilling is largely allowed
- **Financing**: Lack of nationwide system
- **Exports**: Limited oversight, evidence of abuse

# FEC: How Best to Encourage Federal Recycling and Reuse of Used Electronics

## FEC strives to address the factors affecting recycling & reuse through:

- Environmentally preferable purchasing
- Extended lifespan
- Expand markets for recycling
- Potential lifecycle cost savings

## FEC's potential should be strengthened:

- Lack of EPA authority to require broader participation
- Ample precedent: Energy Star
- Survey results: 90% of respondents said FEC's procurement criteria should be required

## Conclusion

“Using the success of the Energy Star program as precedent, the federal government has the opportunity to lead by example by building on existing EPA programs to (1) enhance the domestic recycling infrastructure for used electronics by ensuring a steady and substantial supply of used electronics; (2) stimulate markets for environmentally preferable electronic products by purchasing energy efficient, easily recyclable products with high recycled content and less toxic substances; and (3) save energy by extending the lifespan of used electronics.”

## Recommendation

“...To establish a national recycling infrastructure and encourage environmentally preferable management of used electronics throughout their life-cycle, we recommend that the Administrator direct the Office of Solid Waste to take necessary action (in collaboration with the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive) to require federal agencies to participate in the Federal Electronics Challenge...”