The Scrap Recycling Industry: 
Electronics

The U.S. electronics recycling industry has shown tremendous growth over the past 10 years. This maturing segment of the scrap recycling industry provides a boost of approximately $20.6 billion, including exports of $1.45 billion, to the U.S. economy (up from less than $1 billion in 2002) and employs more than 45,000 full time employees (up from 6,000 in 2002).

In 2011, the U.S. electronics recycling industry processed more than 4.4 million tons of used and end-of-life electronics equipment. ISRI estimates that the volume of electronics recycled in the U.S. now exceeds 5 million tons per year. More than 70 percent of the collected equipment is manufactured into specification grade commodities — including scrap steel, aluminum, copper, lead, circuit boards, plastics, and glass. These valuable commodities are then sold to basic materials manufacturers in the United States and globally as raw material feedstock for new products, such as steel, copper, aluminum, plastic, and glass.

Electronics recyclers repair, refurbish, and resell functioning electronics equipment as used products into domestic and international markets. Companies also provide a number of logistical services, like collection, storage, and transportation as well as scrubbing hard drives of sensitive personal and commercial data.

The industry is driven by equipment collected from businesses and commercial interests, comprising up to 75 percent of the market on a volume basis. The electronics recycling industry is poised to meet the anticipated increased demand for more used products and specification grade commodities.

The electronics recycling industry has seen a dramatic increase in the use of third-party certifications. The marketplace is pushing electronics recyclers to become certified to programs like ISRI’s R2/RIOS® program (www.RIOSCertification.org) to improve operational controls, meet customer demands, and secure a competitive advantage.

The reuse of used electronics equipment and consumption of commodity grade materials recovered from electronics to manufacture new products boosts the U.S. economy, creates jobs, sustains the earth’s natural resources, conserves impressive amounts of energy in the manufacturing process, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions from those facilities.

**Sources:** USITC, ISRI’s Electronics Recycling Policy & USGS.

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