

Congressman Gene Green
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement
“I.T. Procurement and Disposal: Application of the Federal Government’s Green Policies
in the Life Cycle Management of its I.T. Assets”
October 27, 2009

Madame Chairwoman, I want to start by thanking you for holding this hearing to look into, among other issues, the government’s end-of-life electronic waste management.

It is an honor to be asked to testify on a bill I spent countless hours working with my colleague here, Congressman Mike Thompson, on and an issue we continuing to work to address. My real interest in this issue comes from working on and chairing a now defunct subcommittee on the Energy and Commerce Committee.

We started years back with an “e-waste working group” to put forward principles, and to try to develop legislation to stem the export of electronic waste to countries and facilities that were disposing of the waste in ways that were extremely harmful to environment and human health.

Last summer, I became chairman of the subcommittee and made it one of my top priorities to move the issue forward.

Shortly after, I introduced House Resolution 1395 expressing concern over the current Federal policy that allows the exportation of toxic electronic waste to developing nations, and expressing the sense of the House that the United States should join other developed nations and ban the export of toxic electronic waste to developing nations. This resolution gathered 19 cosponsors.

We also began working immediately on legislation that would ban the export of these products to developing countries that do not have the facilities to properly, and safely handle this waste. What produced is H.R. 2595 which amends the Solid Waste Disposal Act to do just that.

While we are still working to strengthen language to ensure it cannot be manipulated. Broadly it only allows exports for products that can be tracked through the refurbishment process and back to the marketplace to prevent abuse.

H.R. 2595 sets the framework for this; we are now just working with the various stakeholders to ensure the language is strong enough and provides enough transparency to ensure it cannot be circumvented.

We are trying to address the current problem where much of the e-waste collected in the U.S. and exported for alleged “recycling” or “reuse” is actually exported to developing nations such as China, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Thailand for unsafe salvage and metals recovery.

There have been numerous reports and stories of toxic e-waste being burned in open fires with no safety equipment and often by children, creating extremely toxic conditions.

The fact that our electronic products are scrapped by children in developing nations using open fires and acid baths is a disgrace. We wouldn't want to import other people's hazardous waste, so we shouldn't send ours overseas.

These conditions have been documented in the films *Exporting Harm* and *Digital Dump*, *National Geographic Magazine*, *60 Minutes* and other media and government sources including a GAO report released just over a year ago.

I am pleased Director Stephenson from the GAO, office of Natural Resources and Environment is on the next panel, as I'm sure he will discuss the report in more depth.

Just briefly, the GAO report that was released last September identified that the "Customs and Border Protection already has a framework in place that could help EPA obtain data and improve oversight of exported used electronics."

It also stated that "the agency's automated tracking systems electronically store information from shippers' export declaration forms, which include tariff codes" and that "adding more detailed codes to the schedule could assist other countries in controlling used electronics exported from the United States."

Our legislation would attempt to build on this by directing the EPA to work with the necessary agencies, including CBP, to set up a system to accomplish this, while detailing what products can be exported and for what purposes.

Madame Chairwoman, I want to again thank you for holding this hearing to look at the electronic lifecycle, and the role our government's I.T. practice play in it. It is a tremendously important issue for our nation to address, and I again want to thank Congressman Thompson for his leadership and help on this issue – and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.