



Facility Manager Tristan Burt... Recycling solutions firm works with local companies to keep technology out of landfills.

Metech recycling facility increases staff, aims to boost awareness of e-recycling

by Aaron Rishel

Metech, an Omaha electronics recycler, has seen the amount of incoming recyclables double or even triple every month in 2009.

Manager and sales supervisor of Metech's Omaha facility, Tristan Burt, has partnered up with the likes of Alegent Health and the Greater Omaha Chamber to shed light on the health and environmental issues of such waste.

"People just don't know," Burt said. "Electronics recycling is a relatively new industry.

"We're getting the information out there to the public that you really need to do your diligence in finding a responsible recycler."

In 2008 Metech combined with Guaranteed Recycling Xperts at 102nd and I St., becoming the ninth Metech facility nationwide. Since then the location has seen the influx of electronics steadily grow.

"Our facility diverts roughly 70,000 pounds to 115,000 pounds of electronics waste a month," Burt said. "The first few months I worked here we were diverting 4,000 to 12,000 pounds."

Metech's facilities nationwide saved over 1.5 million pounds of waste from going to landfills in just the month of August.

The process of recycling these goods has become quite efficient at Metech. When an electronic enters the facility, each one is stripped to its individual components — aluminum, plastic and so on. Computer hard drives are sent through a giant shredder, giving the previous owner confidence that no information will ever be retrieved. About 98 percent of those raw materials are sorted and shipped out for recycling.

Nearly 80 percent of those incoming electronics are from local companies in Omaha including Nebraska Furniture Mart, HDR, Woodmen of the World and the City of Omaha. The other 20 percent comes from everyday consumers bringing in household electronics. To attract more individuals, Metech has held summer events where a percentage of fees from recycling the public's electronics were given back to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation and the local Boy Scouts of America.

Burt's dedication and approach toward his job have been major factors in seeing such growth.

Though bearing the title of "sales supervisor" he sees his role as less of a salesman, and more of an educator. Burt says he is not there to sell, but to paint a picture of what the industry is like and as a result.

Burt has also partnered up with Alegent Health to give speeches at UNMC to biomedical professionals about the contamination hazards from electronics.

He stresses that we cannot fall into the "out of sight, out of mind" mentality and that we need to be proactive to keep these materials out of our water system.

"It's happening in other countries right now," Burt said. "We hear about it, we vacation there.

"We drink bottled water the whole time and it doesn't affect us because we don't see it in our backyard."

Metech is one of 37 companies in the United States that have signed the Basel Action Network (BAN) Pledge. The BAN Pledge is a set of international standards for recycling technology and toxic waste, which exceeds state and federal guidelines.

By being BAN certified, Metech does not export any hazardous materials to other countries or landfills.

With technology trends constantly changing, the effects of its waste are following suit. Burt explains that older TV's and computer monitors contain large

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amounts of lead. The switch to new LCD screens provided the benefit of less lead, but now have more mercury, and with a lifespan half that of a CRT monitor, waste is created faster than ever.

Metech is currently expanding the number of employees to keep up with the growth they've seen just in the last year, and it hopes to expand facilities into neighboring states to serve the entire Midwest.