

BIR CONVENTION: Taking responsibility

Representatives from two OEMs portray their companies' efforts to manage sustainable end-of-life outcomes for their products.

[Brian Taylor](#) May 26, 2015

The E-Scrap Committee of the [Bureau of International Recycling \(BIR\)](#) heard two electronics OEMs describe their recycling and sustainability strategies during its meeting at the 2015 World Recycling Convention in Dubai in May.

Andrea Sarudi of the Corporate Environmental Affairs department of [IBM](#) said the company established environmental requirements in 1971 "that are still valid today." Among the six operations-related requirements is one prioritizing conserving natural resources through reuse, recycling and the use of recyclable materials.

The company's Global Asset Recovery Services (GARS) division has been involved in product take-back, repair and recycling activities since 1989. GARS is part of IBM's wider Product End-of-Life Management (PELM) program.

Sarudi said the PELM program repaired, redeployed or recycled some 913,000 metric tons of obsolete products and materials from 1995 through 2013.

IBM works with suppliers to procure non-hazardous components and to maximize recycling opportunities at the end-of-life stage, said Sarudi, with IBM auditing its suppliers "at least once every three years."

Klaus Hieronymi of [Hewlett Packard Company](#) said, if printing supplies are counted, the company sells some 240 products per second, potentially creating considerable end-of-life responsibilities.

Hieronymi focused on the changing nature of those products, including miniaturization and the use of fewer metals (including precious metals). The changes will greatly affect recycling activities in the near future, he cautioned.

In 2000, popular-selling desktop computers and monitors weighed up to 77 pounds (35 kilograms), including 22 to 33 pounds of metals (10 to 15 kilograms) and "lots of gold," said Hieronymi.

Just 15 years later, thin-screened combination PCs/tablets (like the HP Pavilion Touch) weigh just 13 pounds (6 kilograms), with only 3.3 pounds (1.5 kilograms) of metal and very few precious metals.

There are more mobile devices being sold than ever, and recyclers will soon need to concentrate on maximizing the value of cell phones and tablets while also attempting to gain access to end-of-life servers owned by large retail and telecom companies, he predicted.

Hieronymi said HP is looking for “two or three partners” with international operations who can help the company meet its recycling obligations in the developing world, with more information on a pilot project available [here](#).

Committee member reports at the meeting included one prepared by John Shegerian of [Electronics Recyclers International Inc.](#), Fresno, California, who said some 75 percent of the obsolete electronics flowing into e-scrap facilities in the U.S. come from commercial and institutional sources.

Steve Wong of Hong Kong-based [Fukutomi Company Ltd.](#) said China is attempting to divert e-scrap into “designated recyclable resources industrial parks, such as the Ziya Circular Economy Industrial Park in Tianjin in northern China.

A steady market for plastic scrap generated from electronics is in place in China, said Wong. “The market for [e-scrap] plastic materials has revitalized after the Chinese New Year in mid-February due to gradual improvements in international oil prices, [as well as] improved market liquidity, which has made buyers comfortable.”

The 2015 BIR World Recycling Convention was May 17-20 at the InterContinental Festival City in Dubai.