



It's Earth Day: Recycle your e-junk for free

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A bay area company that recycles old computers and other electronics will recycle your stuff for free all week long in honor of Earth Day.

Tampa, FL -- A bay area company that recycles old computers and other electronics will recycle your stuff for free all week long in honor of Earth Day.

The company, [ViaTeK Solutions](#), will take your old electronic gear, shred and demolish any hard drives or other personal information, and then recycle or resell it in an environmentally responsible way. Many electronics products are packed with toxic materials that shouldn't be thrown in the trash.

ViaTeK's facility at 5005 West Knox St. in Tampa is open from 8 am to 4:30 pm through Friday for free drop-offs by individual consumers. [Click here for directions](#).

People who live in Pinellas County can recycle their electronics for free year-round by dropping their gear off at [this center in northern St. Petersburg](#).

Here's a look inside ViaTeK's busy Tampa recycling center

"All this equipment has just come in from one of our clients," explained Brain Loftin as he walked past shoulder-high stacks of printers and monitors. "This equipment right here will be sorted through and [it will be] determined what we will resell and what will be demanufactured."

So, what does "demanufactured" mean? For the answer, walk over to a conveyor belt that's taking computer components from a worker's hand and lifting them like an escalator toward an opening about 20 feet above the warehouse floor.

The computer hard drives -- vaults full of personal information -- tip off the conveyor belt and into the wide black opening. With a grinding clanking sound, the drives are demolished into dime-sized pieces that funnel straight down into a huge cardboard box below.

"I'd say 98 percent of our clients want their hard drives destroyed and shredded," said Loftin, who's the president of ViaTeK Solutions, a growing Tampa company that resells and recycles old electronics and computer gear for businesses and individual consumers.

Loftin's team then does a number on the gear that used to hold those hard drives, along with pretty much any electronics product that "plugs in, but isn't an appliance."

"Anything that cannot be resold, they separate out the different components here. So we have a steel bin, we've got wiring and cabling here," Loftin said, pointing at a group of storage tubs, each big enough to swallow a washing machine.

To split apart a traditional computer monitor, for example, dust-masked workers wearing aprons, hard hats, and gloves pry the plastic apart and remove the picture tube inside. All of the circuit boards and the electronics from the back of the tube are

separated. The tube itself is placed on a conveyor belt, face down, like a dusty old Hershey's Kiss.

The belt pulls the picture tube through a long enclosed machine which apparently slices it apart. The face of the tube -- the part you're probably looking at right now -- comes out of the end of the machine. It has about the size and bulk of a hardcover book. The piece tumbles off the end of the conveyor into a collection bin. It seems the glass doesn't need to be intact to be recycled.

"Over here we've got monitor boards, we've got yokes off of backs of monitors, we have wiring, we'll have bales of plastic," Loftin said, gesturing to huge bales of equipment stacked on shelves that go all the way to the ceiling. The pieces are packed in plastic wrap and ready to be shipped out.

"All this equipment [contains hazardous materials](#) such as mercury lamps, you have batteries, you have lead in the glass, and so on," Loftin said. "And we send it off to a mercury recycler -- the batteries go off to a battery recycler, and then they can reuse it all."

But some stuff stays at ViaTeK's facility after all of its personal data has been wiped out.

"Any equipment that can be resold, we do store it and we sell it over time for our clients. And they do receive monies back for what we can sell," Loftin said.

It's a little cash back for doing the right thing.

[For other things that you can do on Earth Day in Tampa Bay, click here.](#)

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