



Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota

To: Chair Founj Hawj & Members
MN Senate Environment, Climate & Legacy Committee

From: Tamela K. Walhof, Director
Lutheran Advocacy – Minnesota, ELCA

Re: Support for S.F. 3940

Date: March 4, 2024

Dear Chair Hawj and Members –

I write to you on behalf of Lutheran Advocacy-MN, which is a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and all six Minnesota ELCA Synods. Those synods are made up of almost 1000 ELCA churches and well over 600,000 baptized members statewide.

We support the Electronic Waste Recycling bill, S.F. 3940 and hope you will recognize its **importance to stewardship and care for the earth** (and it's people).

The 2007 Electronics Recycling Act has not adequately served our state for some time. It's time to **expand the definition of e-waste**, allowing for the new sources of batteries and waste that may not have even been conceived of yet. Currently, too many toxic metals and minerals are leaching into groundwater through landfills and spreading through the air due to being burned in incinerators or accidental fires.

We have been hearing from individuals and churches trying to do the right thing in electronic recycling, who cannot find how to dispose of it responsibly in their part of the state. **Free and accessible drop-off or collection** must be made available statewide, along with **education about what constitutes e-waste**. Until working on this bill, many of us had not considered the danger of improperly disposing of Bluetooth ear buds, "singing" greeting cards, and other small electronics (containing batteries and circuit boards) which pose fire hazards if thrown in the trash. Further, **collection and recycling needs to be incentivized**, both to guard against toxins in the air and water, and to extract the minerals that are needed in the production of more batteries and electronics. **True stewardship must consider all these concerns**.

The study from the Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability is already getting attention from some of our churches in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod. The value of what can be extracted from e-waste (\$2.8 billion) are another important form of "mining" and jobs (1700) for that region to consider. This is also important as the world works to move away from fossil fuels, since the minerals and metals in e-waste are increasingly in demand.

Once passed and implemented, **we intend to educate through our church networks to help dramatically increase electronic recycling**. Please don't let us down by not passing it!

Thanks so very much for your attention to electronic recycling!

Tammy Walhof, Director, Lutheran Advocacy-MN
(on behalf of our statewide church networks and synods)

Issue: Electronic Waste

The Problem: Electronic waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world, growing 3-5 percent per year. In fact, around 20 percent of waste globally is from e-waste, while it comprises 70 percent of toxins in landfills. Yet, most anything with a cord, battery or circuit board can be recycled. Out of 266 million pounds of e-waste generated annually in Minnesota, only about 24% is captured, recycled, and reused.



This presents a significant health risk, as well as an economic loss. E-waste in landfills leaches toxins into water supplies, while that burned in garbage incinerators puts dangerous toxins into the air we breathe. Some e-waste causes fires in waste hauling vehicles, landfills, buildings, and more. This adds expense to collection fees and taxes, not to mention damage to the health of nearby residents.

Economic Opportunity: A recent study discovered that if 100 percent of Minnesota's e-waste were recovered, it **could generate \$2.8 billion** and **create almost 1740 directly related jobs** (and many indirect jobs). Sixty-eight different minerals/metals are recoverable, the most valuable of which include Palladium, Platinum, Gold, Copper, Tin, Lithium, Iron, Aluminum, Silver, and Ruthenium. Enough silver can be recovered for 441,000 solar panels, and enough copper for 155,000 electric vehicles. [See [The Economic Potential of E-Waste Recycling in Minnesota: A Pilot Study](#) - p. 6 element charts; pictures/facts from p.7].



155,000 EVs

441,000 solar panels

Past Legislation: Minnesota's Electronics Recycling Act, passed in 2007, is out of date. Some of what it defined as e-waste included electronics like CD/DVD players, VCRs, and other electronics that are no longer popular. Meanwhile, items like Bluetooth ear buds did not even exist until more recent years yet include lithium batteries and circuit boards. E-cigarettes didn't start infiltrating the U.S. market until the late 2000s (and in the case of disposable vapes, aren't even rechargeable). Also, smart phones which most of us now carry (and replace every couple of years) started gaining wide popularity in the years after the introduction of the iPhone at the end of June in 2007 (after the end of the legislative session which passed the Electronics Recycling Act).

At its peak, under the 2007 legislation, around 40 million pounds of e-waste was collected, but by 2021 that was down to only 20 million pounds. Currently, residents and businesses must pay fees (sometimes hefty amounts) to do the right thing by depositing e-waste for recycling. Limited drop-off locations and items collected present further barriers.

2024 Legislative Proposal: Lutheran Advocacy-MN is joining other organizations to pass legislation that would...

- 1) **Change the definition of e-waste** to include any device covered by electricity (This is a broad and flexible definition, which covers any device into the future, including those not yet conceived of)
Exclusions:
 - Lead acid batteries (a car battery buyback program already exists, resulting in a 95% recovery rate)
 - Electronic Vehicles & Infrastructure (recycled by a different process and different stakeholders)
 - White Waste – Refrigerators, washers, dryers,
- 2) Provide **free accessible drop-off or collection** of e-waste statewide for residents AND businesses
- 3) Collect **fees at the point of sale** of electronic items (3-4% of item cost) **to cover collection costs** including disposal, shipping, up to two employees per collector, and an additional incentive per pound.

[See KARE 11 News Coverage of the Study](#)

Sources:

1. Maria Jensen: Repowered (Environment, Health, & Safety); Recycling Electronics for Climate Action (RECA); Areas of Study: Public Health (Research Methods); Environmental Toxicology & Public Health. Presentations: MEP Climate & Energy Cluster; [Ely Tuesday Group](#)
2. Lucy Mullany: Eureka Recycling. Presentations/Discussions: MEP Climate & Energy Cluster
3. Jensen, Maria; Roopali Phadke; Keith Steva; Marlise Riffel. "[The Economic Potential of E-Waste Recycling in Minnesota: A Pilot Study](#)." Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability; Repowered; Macalester College. August 2023.
4. "[Harnessing the Economic Potential of E-Waste Recycling: A New MN Study](#)." Repowered.
5. Smieja, Jon. "[The Enormous Opportunity of E-Waste Recycling](#)." World Economic Forum. March 24, 2023.