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## Green week ironic

Allan Gerlat

It's ironic that NBC advertised its programming last week as having a green theme. Ironic because the set you were watching it on likely is about to become part of a huge environmental problem.

The Federal Communications Commission has mandated that, by February 2009, all TV broadcasting must be digital rather than the current lower quality analog signal. What that means is that most of our TVs, except for those designed to accept digital signals, will be at that moment obsolete.

A session at the recent Wastecon convention discussed this looming issue. Speakers pointed out that an estimated one in four households will be pitching their televisions in the next two years. The projection is that more than 28 million sets could be heading toward the curb.

The huge unanswered question is what will happen to them beyond the curb? Do they end up in a landfill, adding greatly to the garbage pile with a lot of hazardous materials in them? That could mean an environmental disaster for future generations and a lot less landfill capacity for us.

A more appealing option environmentally would be to recycle the TVs. But it's not that easy. The volume involved is more than recyclers currently can handle. And recycling TVs is not a profitable venture. Speakers at the Wastecon session estimated it could cost more than \$20 a set to recycle.

The FCC could help defer some of the costs. But much of that cost likely will fall on the television manufacturers and consumers.

I can hear the cries of outrage now, especially from consumers. And understandably. A lot of people aren't going to be happy spending \$20-plus to recycle the TV they probably didn't want to get rid of in the first place.

There's no easy way to make this dramatic conversion. People will be able to buy converter boxes so they can keep using their analog TVs until they're ready to buy the next generation of sets. That may reduce some of the explosion of units entering the waste stream.

Nevertheless, the mass dumping of TVs is coming. The government needs to pay some serious attention to this potentially devastating impact on the environment that they are creating. And producers and recyclers need to press them - and prepare now for the coming TV waste marathon.

Contact Waste News editor Allan Gerlat at (330) 865-6167 or [agerlat@crain.com](mailto:agerlat@crain.com)

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