

Cash for appliances: Junk piles rise with rebate clunkers

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By Susan Salisbury



More than 90 appliances have been dropped off at the Palm Beach County Solid Waste Authority since Friday, compared with 302 appliances taken there in all of 2009. These so-called 'white goods' will be stripped, flattened and shredded

Refrigerators were the most popular rebate item, followed by dishwashers and clothes washers.

More than 90 appliances have been dropped off at the Palm Beach County Solid Waste Authority since April 16th, said Mark Eyeington, chief of operations.

That's a lot considering 302 appliances were taken there in all of 2009. The authority has certificates to give to people, who must show proof of recycling before they can obtain their \$75 recycling rebates.

But most appliances are left at the curb for pickup or are taken to recyclers by the appliance companies, Eyeington said.

At the county landfill, workers remove refrigerants from refrigerators, freezers and air conditioners, as required by federal law. Then the appliances go to Trademark Metals Recycling.

The clunker refrigerator you've sent off for recycling could turn up in your kitchen again someday. Don't worry, it's not coming back. But the steel extracted from it could be used to make a new appliance.

Since Florida's \$17.5 million cash-for-appliances rebate signup ended last week, more appliances, referred to in the recycling trade as "white goods," are showing up at metals recyclers and at the Palm Beach County Solid Waste Authority.

Brenda Buchan, manager of the state's program, said three-quarters of Floridians who secured 72,700 priority numbers to submit rebate applications plan to recycle their old appliances.

There, the appliances are flattened, then trucked to a "shredder yard," where they are often processed along with junked cars. Metals are separated from the plastics using magnets and other technology. After being ground into fist-size pieces, the steel is taken to a steel mill, such as Gerdau Ameristeel near Jacksonville, to be reprocessed.

"It could come back as the door in your car or a new appliance, or as a big beam in a high-rise," said Jeff Horowitz, facility manager at Trademark Metals Recycling in West Palm Beach .

A 1990 state law bans appliances from being dumped in landfills .

Although the valuable metals, including steel, copper and aluminum, are recycled, that's not the case for other components such as plastics, said Amy Graham, spokeswoman for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The other shredded materials, commonly called fluff, are thrown away, Graham said.

The \$86 billion-a-year metals recycling industry has its roots in the junk car business, but it's unclear when appliance recycling began. A newer aspect of recycling is of electronics such as cellphones and computers.

Combined, it's being called "urban mining," said John Shegerian, chief executive officer of Electronic Recyclers International in Fresno, Calif.

"The key now is to keep this stuff above ground and not let it go into a landfill. Landfills cost us all money," Shegerian said. "All metals are infinitely recyclable. A gold wedding ring can become a semiconductor, then another piece of jewelry."

Recycling aluminum, for example, as compared with mining and making it from virgin ore, results in 95 percent energy savings.

David Wagger, director of environmental management at the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries in Washington, D.C., said recycling appliances makes sense economically and environmentally.

"You are not throwing away perfectly good material that can be recycled and returned to a useful purpose," Wagger said.