An Earth Day Focus on Electronics: You can help turn "trash" into "treasure"

April 5, 2016: Boulder, CO - Earth Day has proven that individuals, acting together, can be a powerful driver of change. SERI, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting responsible electronics recycling around the world, hopes every user of electronic devices remembers this on April 22nd – Earth Day. Strategy Analytics, an internationally-recognized research firm, estimates that 12 billion internet connected devices (smartphones, tablets, computers, smart TVs) are currently in use worldwide, and that the number is expected to reach 33 billion within the next four years – an average of 2.3 devices for every person on the planet. This presents us with an increasingly urgent challenge: How to safely and sustainably manage the growing volume of discarded and obsolete devices.

Used electronic material (referred to by many as "e-waste") is actually a resource that remains largely untapped because of the prevalence of land disposal. United Nations University reports that used electronic devices contain precious metal "deposits" 40 to 50 times richer than newly mined ore. Yet almost 80% of these precious metals are landfilled instead of responsibly recovered. This is a tremendous waste of valuable resources.

"As continued demand for new devices contributes to the depletion of our limited supply of mined resources, we must rethink the whole notion of "e-waste," says John Lingelbach, SERI's executive director. "A more sustainable solution is to extend the life of electronic products when possible, and when those products reach end-of-life, responsibly recycle them, thereby preserving resources and reducing the environmentally harmful effects of electronics in landfills."

Reuse is the most environmentally beneficial way to manage used electronic devices. In many regions of the world, the demand for affordable refurbished devices is strong and has helped to bridge the digital divide. Reuse of electronic parts and components is another sustainable option.

For electronics without viable reuse potential, responsible recycling can recover virtually all of the precious metals, plastics, glass and other materials so that they can be reintroduced into the manufacturing stream. Tapping into this supply of resources will help meet the growing demand for new electronics products, while at the same time, helping to reduce the negative environmental impact of mining for new materials, and keeping more electronics out of landfills.

How can you make a difference? By assuring that the electronic devices you no longer use are refurbished and reused, or recycled by a responsible electronics recycler. A helpful way of determining that an electronics recycler manages electronics responsibly is to find out if they are certified to the R2 (Responsible Recycling) Standard. R2 certified recyclers adhere to the highest industry standards for safe and sustainable refurbishing, recycling, data destruction, and ensuring that your unwanted electronics do not end up in landfills. Many electronics recyclers claim to follow responsible practices, but R2 certified refurbishers and recyclers undergo annual third-party audits to prove it. To learn more about responsible electronics reuse and recycling, or to find an R2 Certified recycler, please visit www.SustainableElectronics.org.

About SERI (Sustainable Electronics Recycling International)

SERI is a non-profit organization that works to create a world where electronic products are reused and recycled in a way that promotes resource preservation; the well-being of the natural environment; and the health and safety of workers and communities. It does this by promoting certification to the R2 Standard for Responsible Recycling, and through other education and outreach initiatives

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