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## Intechra LLC Keeps Old Computers Out Of Waste Stream

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**LEON ROWE, AN EMPLOYEE AT INTECHRA, disassembles computer equipment at the company's warehouse in Windsor. Intechra manages computer equipment by either storing, fixing, selling or sending it out to be recycled or discarded. (KIM WALKER / HARTFORD COURANT / August 1, 2008)**

WINDSOR - They may be vast repositories of information, but after five years on the job, they're often cracked and yellowed and their insides fried.

If you've ever wondered where old computers go after being unceremoniously hauled from the office, here's one answer: Thousands, more than six truckloads a day, are shipped to Intechra's 85,000-square-foot plant in Windsor, including computers so old they use 5-inch floppy disks.

"We even get mainframes from the 1970s with tape reels, Austin Powers-type things," said Kevin Lindsay, the plant's director of operations.

The privately owned firm, with headquarters in Jackson, Miss., remanufactures, recycles and shreds computers, laptops, servers and other electronic items, said Michael Profit, the company's chief operating officer.

The firm operates six processing plants around the country, including the one in Windsor, which employs 100, and a dozen smaller collection centers nationwide.

Last year, Intechra LLC, which reported revenue of \$100 million, recycled more than 96 million pounds of electronics, Profit said. Most of the items come from businesses and other organizations, although the company occasionally pairs with municipal organizations to help people dispose of obsolete home computers.

Intechra was founded four years ago by Chip Slack, the company's chairman and chief executive, and a small group of investors. Together, they raised \$50 million to create a coast-to-coast network of collection and recycling centers, a goal they've accomplished by buying independent computer recycling facilities across the nation, Profit said. Today, the company employs more than 600 people nationwide.

It's not uncommon for government agencies and businesses to replace their hardware every two to four years, Profit said.

As a result, computers and their ilk are one of the world's fastest growing waste streams.

But e-waste, as it's sometimes referred to, "is hazardous waste," said Sarah Westervelt, project coordinator with Basel Action Network, a Seattle-based nonprofit group that promotes the environmentally sound disposal of waste.

"Unlike an aluminum can, e-waste has many types of plastic, metal and components that are toxic and hard to separate. The heavy glass monitors are full of lead. Even the cabling — you might think it's benign, but when you melt those wires at low temperatures, you create new toxins," Westervelt said.

In recent years, photographs of computers and monitors piled high and dumped in developing countries have become common. "You see children working with fires and acids trying to reclaim the precious metals," Profit said.

Unlike some disposal companies, Intechra adheres to a zero-landfill, zero export policy, Profit said.

"Intechra is one of the companies that meets our responsible recycling criteria," Westervelt said.

For many businesses, it's not just the hardware that represents a volatile disposal issue, it's the data contained inside: spreadsheets, medical records, confidential information.

In the wrong hands, those old, cracked hard drives can pose a security threat, Profit said

At Intechra's Windsor facility, locked doors, key cards and security guards protect the computers, laptops and servers that arrive at the loading dock stacked onto pallets and encased in shrink wrap.

Every incoming item is tagged and tracked.

"The first thing we do is destroy all the data on the drives," Lindsay said. "We assure our customers that the data is not recoverable."

Items that can be remanufactured, such as working laptops and CPUs, are refurbished or repaired. Some computers are returned to their corporate owners to be redeployed in another department; while other items are donated or sold on [eBay](#) or through the company's online store, [Intechraoutlet.com](#).

"The best thing for the environment is reuse," Profit said. "Our efforts focus around reuse and remanufacturing. Shredding is the last resort."

Items that can't be reused are harvested for parts. The leftovers, various plastics and circuit boards are recycled at Intechra's shredding facility in Columbus, [Ohio](#).

"We have machines that chew up monitors, chew up servers," Profit said.

Despite doing business with more than 50 Fortune 100 firms, "There are lots of companies that don't know we exist," Profit said. "Our biggest competitor is the lack of awareness — they'll end up storing or dumping this stuff because they don't know what to do with it."



(KIM WALKER / HARTFORD COURANT / August 1, 2008)

AN INTECHRA EMPLOYEE loads shrink-wrapped monitors out of the company's warehouse in Windsor. The firm remanufactures, recycles and shreds computers and other electronic items