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## **Treating Tech Waste Demands Cooperation**

*Mike McDonald - May 15, 2009*

Disposing of electronic waste demands worldwide cooperation. At least that's how Guillermo Perseira sees it.

"Recycling can't be done by only one country," Perseira said. "Every country, every region has to be responsible for the waste their products produce."

Perseira is the general manager of Fortech, the Costa Rican brand of the Canadian-based Global Electric Electronic Processing company that recycles electronic waste.

Fortech began operations in Costa Rica about a year ago in Cartago, and it is the only company in Costa Rica with the capacity to treat electronic waste.

The company collects unwanted electronics, separates the devices into parts – glass, metal, computer boards etc. – and returns the pieces to the manufacturer.

The problem is that Costa Rica imports most of its electronics, so returning the equipment is neither cheap nor easy.

In 2006, the country imported more than 45,000 tons of electronic devices, half of which were computers and televisions.

Perseira estimates that Ticos produce about 40,000 tons of electronic waste annually, and his company can treat only about 300-500 tons each year, most of which is shipped out of the country.

"We need more infrastructure," he said. "We don't have the manpower to collect and redistribute all this waste."

While investing in more electronic waste management infrastructure is part of the solution, Perseira said the key is to force companies that manufacture the devices to be responsible for collecting and treating unwanted products.

"Companies have to allow room in their budget to collect and treat their waste after it's been used."

Fortech has had a contract with the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE) for almost a year, but it recently signed a contract with Epson, a Japan-based printer and computer company. Fortech dismantles and separates Epson's waste and ships it back to the plant of origin, mostly in the U.S.

"The idea is to get companies to produce only the volume necessary," Perseira said. "If they have to pay to collect their waste, they will begin to invest in more sustainable technologies."

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