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Hazard disposal limited by jumble of local regulations

**Roger Witherspoon**

The Journal News

Brian Summers had a mess in his Katonah home and did not know what to do with it.

A massive power surge June 20 had destroyed his new wide-screen television, along with his computer, printer, microwave oven, VCR and surge protector.

"Smoke just started pouring out of them," he recalled, and he dragged the wrecked items to his back yard.

Summers, 59, a freelance editor, was one of more than 400 residents who suffered damage to electronic equipment because of a malfunctioning New York State Electric and Gas Corp. transformer near the Katonah train station.

But Summers' wrecked equipment didn't stay in his back yard for long.

While driving through Southeast with a friend a few days later, he noticed "there were appliances out on the street all over town. So we went home, got mine and trucked them out there and left them.

"It was really just luck that they were having a cleanup, and I hope they don't get mad at me now. But I didn't know where else to put the things."

Summers isn't alone in not knowing what to do.

Rules for residents on how to dispose of old televisions, refrigerators, paints, pesticides and other household liquid and solid wastes vary with each municipality and county.

Southeast has bulk pickups of household items on designated streets between April 7 and Oct. 20.

If Summers had been visiting the village of Brewster, he would have missed its

sidewalk bulk pickup, which was held in April and won't be repeated until Sept. 22.

"The biggest problem with recycling is the lack of standardization," said Gordon Maxwell, executive director of Putnam County's recycling program. "Every county in the state and every state in the country does things differently. There should be standardization so if you go from New York to Arizona, comprehensive waste management is all the same."

New York state assists counties in reducing household hazardous waste by providing grants to cover up to 50 percent of the cost of running countywide pickups of hazardous household waste.

On these occasions, residents can bring a wide variety of wastes - from liquid chemicals and pesticides to computer monitors - to a central point.

The counties then sort the material and have it removed by professional haulers and recycling firms.

Modern electronic waste contains heavy metals - such as lead in the screens and benzene in the plastic - that break down in landfills and can contaminate groundwater.

Westchester County offers quarterly cleanup days, with the next one scheduled for Saturday at the County Recycling Center off the New York State Thruway in Yonkers.

Putnam County has the event twice annually, with its fall cleanup scheduled for Oct. 16 at Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park in Putnam Valley.

If Summers lived in Rockland County, he could have dropped off his electronic equipment at the Solid Waste Management Authority's recycling facility in Pomona, adjacent to the fire training center. Rockland is one of the few counties in the state with a permanent household hazardous waste facility.

The site is open weekdays and selected weekends.

Ron Delo, the authority's executive director, said the facility is open during the week, and "we accept anything you have that has a plug coming out of it."

Computer equipment, like other household goods brought to the site, is periodically forwarded to a private recycling company. "They demanufacture them," Delo said, "and recover the various components."

If Summers lived in Ramapo, however, he wouldn't even have to make the trek to the county recycling facility. In Ramapo, Delo said, "they leave their computer equipment in the trash, and the town brings it to the Solid Waste Authority."

Westchester County has a "treasure hunt" on its Web site for unwanted household furniture and electronics. Here, residents can post their usable castoffs, and people who want the item can contact them and make arrangements to take it away.

"No money changes hands," said Jim Hogan, director of the county's recycling office. "This is just a way of keeping these items out of the trash."

Hogan added, however, that the county-run swap site wouldn't have helped Summers because items listed in the county's treasure chest must be in working order.

For each type of modern household waste, there are different services provided by municipal governments. In most communities, appliances containing the chilling gas freon, used in air conditioners and refrigerators, is not picked up as bulk metal until the gas has been removed. That is usually the responsibility of the homeowner, who would have to contract with a licensed private firm.

But in New Rochelle, Cortlandt and Yonkers, getting rid of refrigerators is a service provided to the homeowners, though New Rochelle charges a fee of \$20.

"When New Rochelle has several of these appliances," Hogan said, "they call in an extractor who gives them a discounted price to remove the freon. Yonkers went so far as to have its staff certified, and they remove the freon.

"Getting rid of a refrigerator can be easy or hard, depending on where you live. We have 43 municipalities, and they're all different. Some leave you on your own, and some don't."

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#### Recycling dangerous waste

Residents may bring waste items for free disposal during Westchester County's next Household Chemical Clean-up Day on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Westchester County Recycling Center in Yonkers, located off Exit 6A of the New York State Thruway. Preregistration is required at 914-813-5425 to dispose of more than 60 pounds of solid material or 25 gallons of liquid.

#### ACCEPTED ITEMS:

- \* Electronic goods, i.e. computer screens and televisions
- \* Mercury thermometers
- \* Most auto fluids, i.e. antifreeze, brake fluid and gasoline
- \* Fire-starting fluids, i.e. kerosene, butane and charcoal lighter fluid
- \* Car tires (limit 10)
- \* Metal, furniture and jewelry polish or wax
- \* Wood preservatives
- \* Pesticides, herbicides, insecticides
- \* Photographic and swimming pool chemicals
- \* Paint thinners, turpentine and solvents

- \* Fluorescent lights
- \* Fire extinguishers and 1- or 2-pound propane gas tanks

UNACCEPTED ITEMS:

- \* Paint: Dry cans may be placed in regular garbage or put curbside on bulk collection days.
- \* Car batteries: Return to battery retailers.
- \* Motor oil: Return to service station.
- \* Smoke and fire detectors: May be thrown in the garbage or recycled with manufacturer.
- \* Compressed-gas cylinders, 20-pound propane, helium and oxygen tanks. Must be removed by a private company that may charge a fee.
- \* Freon appliances, such as air conditioners and refrigerators. These are removed locally as bulk metal after the freon has been removed. Yonkers and Cortlandt will collect residents' appliances containing freon.

Web site: [www.westchestergov.com/envfacil](http://www.westchestergov.com/envfacil)