

# Charlotte recycling business sees green in discarded e-devices

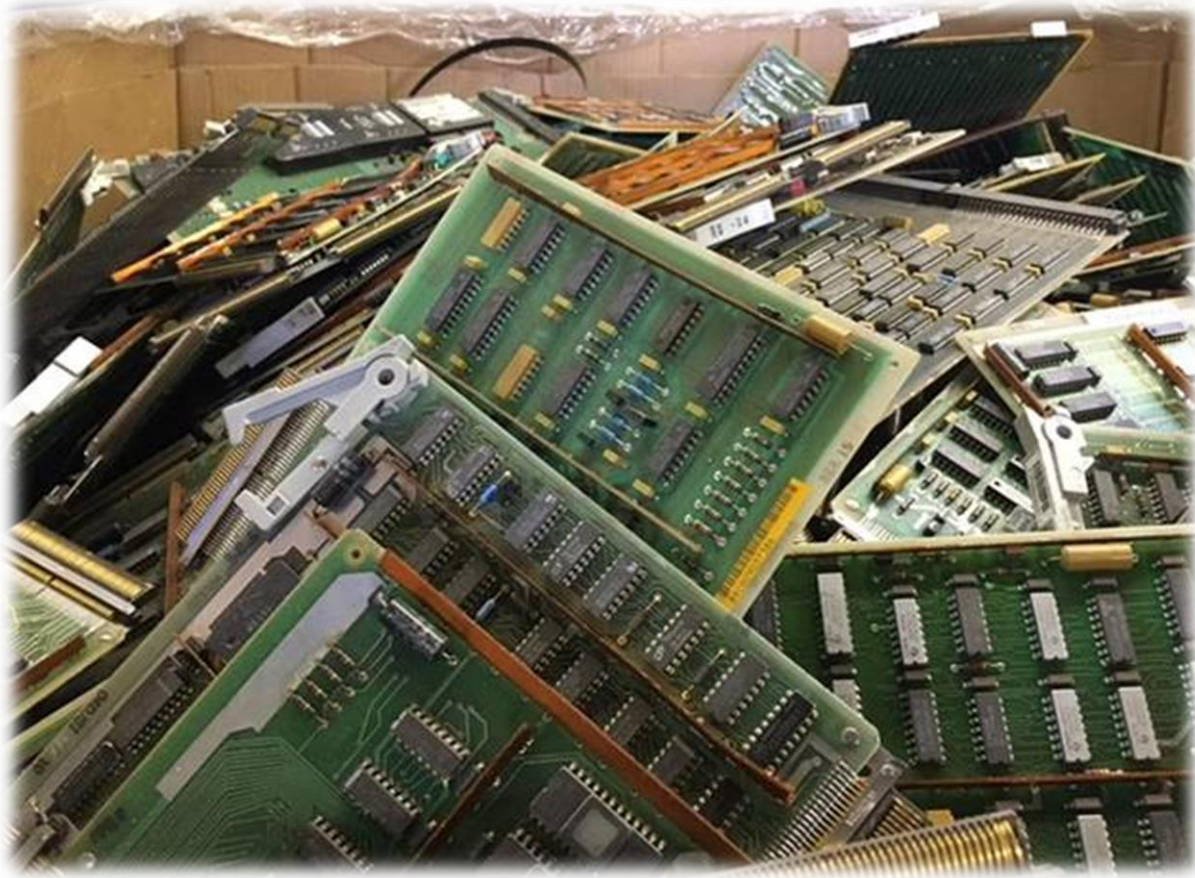
Electronic waste accounts for over 70 percent of toxic waste in U.S. landfills

All Green Recycling CEO Carol Jegou saw that as a business opportunity

---

Company recycles millions of pounds of electronics each year, grows 35 percent every month.





All Green Recycling does not send anything to the landfill. Here, motherboards are separated from the rest of the devices to be sold as a commodity.

**Rachel Stone** [restone@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:restone@charlotteobserver.com)

BY RACHEL STONE

Inside All Green Recycling's 40,000-square-foot facility in west Charlotte, there's a locked steel cage where your old electronic toys go to die. From your discarded Nintendo 1 to your outdated iPhone or 1980s Macintosh IIsi, All Green Recycling has seen it all.

We may not think about what happens to our old devices once we're done with them, but Carol Jegou does.



CEO of All Green Recycling, Carol Jegou **Rachel Stone** [restone@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:restone@charlotteobserver.com)

Jegou, 66, is the CEO of a self-built business that focuses on properly breaking down and recycling these old electronic devices. She said “absolutely nothing” goes into the landfill.

“Think about yourself, personally, how many devices you have ... and multiply that by how many people there are and how many businesses there are,” she said. “There is never a shortage of electronic recycling. There’s just no shortage.”

Electronics consume our daily lives, and the lifespan of these devices is shrinking. EPA reports show that electronic waste is growing two to three times faster than any other waste stream in America. Most of these devices are made from parts containing lead, mercury, lithium, silver and barium—all of which damage the environment and human health.

Only about 12 percent of electronic waste is recycled, according to Steve Gomez, vice president of business development and operations. Electronics comprise just two percent of America’s trash in landfills but over 70 percent of overall toxic waste.

What started as a 6,000-square-foot facility in New Jersey in 2013 expanded to Charlotte two years ago. Jegou and her husband, Peter, moved to Charlotte with

the business. Peter is the president of All Green Recycling and oversees the day-to-day operations.

The warehouse is separated into a few different areas. There's a large open area filled with boxes that houses receiving. A loading dock on the side of the building gives easy access for deliveries. Jegou says the company initially started with this area only, but has since expanded.

The rest of the facility houses dismantling and sorting areas. There is a separate storage space for batteries, as the company treats them as universal and hazardous waste. Offices are scattered around the main warehouse and the building next door.

### **Law creates a business opportunity**

All Green Recycling works this way: Customers with old devices contact the company, which will pick up the order and deliver it to the warehouse. The delivery is assigned a work order and weighed.

Data-driven devices are stored in that locked cage until trained personnel handle dismantling. Other devices go right to sorting. If the client has authorized the resale of their product—which about half allow—it will go to the reuse resale department. Otherwise, the device is dismantled and its parts separated into different commodities.

Jegou touts that nothing from their company goes to the landfill. Each part of a device, including the shredded bits, is sold as a commodity to pre-approved downstream vendors. For example, they fill a dumpster with about 10,000 pounds of scrap metal each week and ship it to Queen City Metals. Vendors then recycle and reuse the commodities.

By selling these commodities, the company is able to pay for its overhead costs and continue to provide free electronic recycling. The company charges for pickup services, but typically not much else.

“We really don't charge for this service,” Gomez said. “Other than stuff that we have to pay for down the road to dispose of, like the batteries ... [or] the lead in glass.”

It's a business model built on the law: North Carolina is one of 22 states that bans electronic devices from landfills. Any individual or business in N.C. attempting to throw away electronics face a \$5,000 fine for the first offense.

Jegou says this isn't policed or enforced. In May,

[lawmakers introduced legislation](#) that, if passed, would repeal the state's electronic recycling program. Some lawmakers are saying there aren't enough recyclers in the state to handle all the electronic waste produced.

But All Green Recycling executives disagree. With business growing by 35 percent every month, Jegou said clients now include major businesses like AT&T, Time Warner Cable and Konica Minolta.

## **Keeping data safe**

Jegou, who wouldn't discuss revenues for the company, says the Charlotte and New Jersey sites combined recycle millions of pounds of electronics each year. While All Green Recycling works primarily with other companies, it will take individual consumers' old devices for free.

As cybersecurity worries make headlines, company leaders say others are turning to them—particularly law firms, accounting firms, banks and healthcare groups.

That's because of the company's stringent data security policies from the initial pickup to the device's destruction.

When the driver arrives to pick up an order, a seal is placed over a lock on the truck. Once the truck arrives at the warehouse, a supervisor verifies the number and checks the seal.

Authorized employees have passed drug testing and background checks and receive specific training from the company. Only these employees will dismantle data-driven devices. The hard drive is then destroyed in the shredder. No data can be recovered at that point.

“There could be millions of dollars in lawsuits for [a data breach],” Gomez said. “So that's why we treat it the way we do.”

## **Client list spawns new business idea**

Jegou said while she had no background in the recycling business before launching the company, her entrepreneurship roots run deep. A longtime New Jersey resident, she started her own consulting firm in 1994. Jegou said that work, paired with her location, put her into contact with a wide range of businesses—from small ventures to Fortune 500 companies.

Many of the companies she worked with upgraded their technology—and then left their old computers, hard drives and all, in storage areas right in the office.

That gave Jegou and her husband had an idea: What if they developed a company that works with other businesses on the proper dismantling and recycling of these gadgets?

“We saw a definite need,” she said. “And we saw combined what we could do in the electronic recycling sector.”

They co-founded All Green Recycling in June 2013. As the business grew, they looked to expand to another city. Charlotte landed on their radar because of the number of businesses and fast growth, she said. They opened off Atando Avenue in December 2014 and now have 15 employees.

In 2014 following a lengthy application process, the company earned woman owned certification through the National Women Business Owners Corporation.

This helps Jegou land business, she said. Many major corporations have supplier-diversity programs that set aside money for vendors owned by minorities, including women.

While the company has other competitors in the electronic recycling space, Jegou said clients pick them because of those credentials and their detail to customer needs, specifically their attention to data security.

Read more here: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/small-business/article82516842.html#storylink=cpy>