

TRENDS & Ideas

ENVIRONMENT

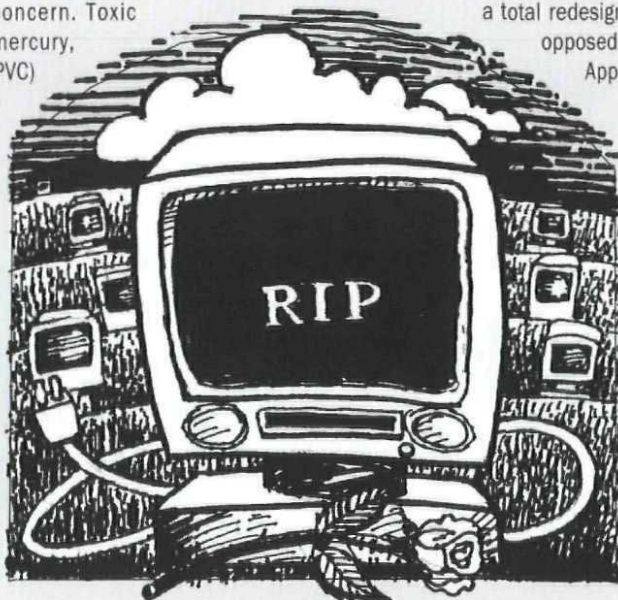
Recycling PCs

They tried for eight months to sell, donate, or recycle their discarded computer equipment (three tons of it) after purchasing new computers, but *The Morning News*, Florence, SC, found only one place that would take their equipment—a landfill. According to *Business Week*, getting computer manufacturers to accept recycling responsibility for their products is a growing concern. Toxic wastes such as lead, cadmium, mercury, chromium, and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) from computers, cell phones, and other electronics can leach into groundwater or produce dioxins and other carcinogens when burned.

The problem can only get worse, as replacement cycles for computers are getting faster and faster. The average life of a computer in 1994 was four to six years; the National Safety Council estimates that by 2004 the average life will be two years, with few being reused. The Environmental Protection Agency already considers cathode-ray tubes (CRTs) as hazardous waste; however, current

regulations allow users to dump up to 220 pounds of CRT waste (approximately three or four machines) per month. Tougher regulations proposed in Europe would require manufacturers to collect, recycle, and dispose of their electronic products. The proposal includes a mandate to phase out toxins by 2008—a step that would require a total redesign of the manufacturing process and is opposed by Europe's Association of Household Appliance Manufacturer's.

Some U.S. manufacturers, including IBM, Intel, and Hewlett-Packard, support elements of the European proposal and have expressed a willingness to accept recycling responsibility for their products. An IBM taskforce is studying the feasibility of taking back its PCs and finding an economical, environmentally sound way to dispose of them. Programs that charge a fee for disposal of equipment or include the cost of detoxifying computers in the purchase price lie in the future for computer makers and users, who may soon have to clean up after themselves.



EMPLOYMENT

Communication Gap

Recruiters, take heed: The information employers put in job advertisements is not what potential employees want to know and may discourage talented applicants from applying, a recent poll suggests. Its findings indicate that employers may be too focused on big-picture issues, while job seekers want to know how the job will affect their day-to-day lives.

Conducted by Career-Builder Inc. and Power Hiring Inc., the poll showed that employers were most likely to rank company vision and job responsibilities as the most important elements of a job advertisement. Job seekers agreed that job descriptions are important, but also wanted information about compensation and required job skills and education.

To attract top candidates employers should focus 50 percent of any advertisement on what candidates are expected to accomplish. Job description information, along with a little information on growth paths and corporate culture, offers a compelling opportunity, advises Lou Adler, president of Power Hiring.

The poll revealed other

gaps between job seekers and employers, as well. When choosing between two positions with identical salaries, job seekers were most likely to rank job locations and telecommuting options as the most important determining factors. Employers, on the other hand, see job location and telecommuting as low job-seeker priorities. Most em-

ployers ranked corporate culture and quality of co-workers as elements they would promote first to lure candidates.

However, both groups agreed that employee testimonials are the best way for job seekers to evaluate companies. A high percentage also agreed that the Internet is their preferred job search method.

THE INTERNET

Shopping for Docs Online

Two Web sites that allow prospective patients to "hire" physicians online will debut soon, according to Leigh Page in *American Medical News*.

Both sites are the creations of Minneapolis-based firms. HealtheCare (healthe-care.com) plans to launch a pilot project in that city by year's end. Vivius (vivius.com) launched its pilot in Kansas City on September 1 and will offer full services there and in Minneapolis by New Year's Day.

Both companies intend to sell a full range of healthcare services. Under their approach, employers will put up the funding, which employees

will then use to pay for the services of physicians (and other providers) listed on the Web sites. Physicians will set their prices as they please. Employees who choose physicians charging more than that allowed by the employer's fund will make up the difference out of their own pockets. Vivius and HealtheCare make their profits by charging the listed physicians a percentage of their fees.

Beyond that, the companies operate somewhat differently. HealtheCare will mainly offer the services of several independent physician associations; employees will in effect choose care networks. Vivius, on the other hand,

will ask employees to choose from among individual providers divided into 20 categories, including primary care physicians, specialists, hospitals, laboratories, and pharmacies.

Big U.S. employers are increasingly open to experiments like those represented by Vivius and HealtheCare. Such companies would like

to drop health insurance and instead give employees "defined contributions" with which they would buy their own care. Under such a system, many employers believe, employees would become more prudent consumers.

Nevertheless, Vivius and HealtheCare are having some difficulty persuading em-

ployers and physicians that their plan is a good one. Lee Newcomer, MD, Vivius's chief medical officer, says that small employers are more likely to try the new approach than large ones with long-established policies. But, however it occurs, Newcomer believes that online healthcare will in the end prevail.



MENTAL HEALTH

Employers Taking Depression Seriously

Companies have become much more direct in recent years in tackling signs of depression among employees, writes Emil Vernarec in *Business & Health*. Employers have learned that allowing symptoms such as anger, irritability, withdrawal, and energy loss to go untreated can be harmful to productivity.

Today companies try in a variety of ways to tackle depression before it becomes a serious problem. In Chicago, for instance, Bank One takes great care to make sure that workers understand the operations of its employee assistance program (EAP), which deals with emotional illness and other problems.

"You don't want to simply stick it on as a benefit," says Dan Conti, PhD, Bank One's EAP director. "You need to give employees road signs on how to use it."

L.L. Bean, based in Freeport, ME, hired an EAP consultant to lead sessions on recognizing depressive symptoms and bringing them to a physician's attention. About 80 percent of the firm's 3,200 full-time employees

participated in the sessions.

Magellan Behavioral Health, Columbia, MD, trains its managers in how to address performance issues in workers who seem to need an EAP referral. A team helps the manager clarify the problem, keep the focus on job performance, and communicate with the employee in a way that does not violate his or her privacy rights.

IBM, based in Armonk, NY, offers its 120,000 U.S. employees an interactive "Assessment and Personal Guide to Handling Stress." The assessment, which takes about 40 minutes to complete, encourages the worker to rate himself or herself on nine potentially stressful areas of life, including job, family, social, and financial. A private report immediately following the assessment interprets the worker's score, suggests actions to take, and even provides phone numbers.

"Simply taking the assessment has benefits, because you've identified and labeled the source of stress," says Bernadette DelBene, IBM's nurse program manager.