



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
September 12, 2006

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## **As Cell Phone Industry Meets to Promote New Technology It Fails to Recycle the Old**

*Despite improvements and progress in some areas,  
130 million phones are still discarded annually*

Sep 12 -- The four major U.S. wireless service providers continue to shirk their responsibility to promote recycling of retired cell phones – even as the wireless industry prepares to meet in Los Angeles to publicize new wireless technologies. Approximately 98% of the 130 million cell phones discarded each year remain unrecycled.

Five months after the release of the [Cell Phone Recycling Report Card](#), some of the nation's top wireless service providers have begun to improve their recycling efforts. But they still have significant improvements to make, according to EARTHWORKS, a Washington, DC-based conservation group.

"Apparently, the cell phone industry doesn't think that 65,000 tons of toxic waste discarded each year is a major concern. If they did, cell phone recycling information would be as ubiquitous as cell phones themselves," said Kimberlee Dinn, Recycle My Cell Phone campaign director. "Although the wireless industry has made small progress in increasing the prominence of recycling programs since last Earth Day, they still have a long way to go," she continued.

In the April 2006 report, the four major U.S. wireless service providers (Cingular, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon Wireless) received an "F" for failing to promote responsible recycling with their customers to combat the growing problem of e-waste.

After the report and in response to the thousands of consumers that were subsequently mobilized by EARTHWORKS, some service providers have increased the public's access to their take-back programs. Notably, Cingular has increased their program's website visibility and T-Mobile is more proactively promoting their program by distributing postage-paid mail-in bags at their retail stores.

However, the problem of improperly disposed of phones, or e-waste, remains serious. More than 98% of the 130 million cell phones retired in the U.S. each year are not recycled. When thrown away or improperly recycled, these phones can have adverse effects on human health and the environment, as they contain toxics such as lead, cadmium, arsenic and mercury.

As cell phone subscriptions continue to reach new highs and states such as California enact legislation on cell phone take-back, EARTHWORKS is calling on the wireless providers to implement nationwide the recommendations of the [Cell Phone Recycling Report Card](#).

Specifically, EARTHWORKS is calling on all wireless service providers to:

- Get the word out and collect more phones: Steps must be taken to educate customers about their provider's take-back program and efforts must be made to make the process more user-friendly. Cingular has taken the lead online by making recycling information prominent via the front page of their website and their search function. Both Sprint and T-Mobile websites enable customers to print out pre-paid mailing labels to send in phones from home and T-Mobile even distributes postage-paid bags in their retail stores. Each service provider should embrace all of these developments, as well as begin to include recycling in their print, television and radio ads, and at the point of purchase.
- Be more transparent: EARTHWORKS has found that service providers have rarely produced reliable data on the number of cell phones that they have collected for recycling or refurbishment. In order to accurately assess the scope of the issue and to track progress, service providers should commit to closely tracking and then publicizing the results of their programs.
- Ensure that phones are responsibly recycled: Service providers should be accountable for the standards under which their chosen recycler processes their phones and be aware of the efficacy and location of the processing. EARTHWORKS continues to endorse the Electronics Recycler's Pledge of True Stewardship as a starting point for responsible recyclers.

In addition to the recommendations of the report, EARTHWORKS is also calling on service providers to promote responsible consumption of their products. For example, each time a consumer upgrades their phone they should be asked to recycle their retired phone in the store or with a simple pre-paid mailing envelope. "Whenever consumers upgrade their phone, every effort should be made to make recycling part of the transaction," said Kimberlee Dinn.

EARTHWORKS also today published an updated Cell Phone Recycling Report Card (including errata sheet). To learn about how to responsibly recycle a cell phone and its accessories, visit EARTHWORKS' Recycle My Cell Phone website at [www.recyclemycellphone.org](http://www.recyclemycellphone.org).

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*EARTHWORKS is a non-profit organization that works to protect communities and the environment. Recycle My Cell Phone is an EARTHWORKS grassroots public education campaign that works to reduce virgin metal demand by cell phones by increasing recycling rates and promoting efforts to reduce consumption.*