

## **Take a Byte Out of Landfills**

by Michele Guitard, DSHE Pollution Prevention Program

Many personal computer (PC) users wonder what can be done with computer diskettes that are no longer needed. Approximately four million diskettes are thrown out by PC users every day, adding up to almost one billion disks a year. The large majority of disks that are disposed of in the trash will end up in a landfill where they take approximately 450 years to biodegrade and could potentially leach oxides into the water system. A small percentage of these disks are incinerated, contributing to the formation of acid rain.

The Software Manufacturer's Association found that less than 30% percent of all packaged software is recycled, including the software's paper or cardboard packaging. At Aberdeen Proving Ground paper and cardboard can easily be recycled, but you might be wondering what to do with the disks. Disks containing obsolete information can be cleared and reused by the owners themselves or the disks can be sent to companies that either recycle or recertify them.

The recertification process begins by erasing the disks and sending them through a heat tunnel to remove labels. The disks will then be reformatted, tested for errors, cleaned, and recertified. These recertified disks must pass the same stringent certification standards as new disks before they are then sold as generic disks.

During National Pollution Prevention Week (September 20-24), the APG Directorate of Safety, Health, and Environment (DSHE) Pollution Prevention (P2) Program will be collecting 3 ½ x 3 ½ computer disks for recertification. The P2 Program will send them to a U.S. company that recertifies diskettes for free. There will be collection boxes located at the pollution prevention display in the PX, in the lobby and third floor of Building 4304, in the lobby of the Edgewood DSHE building, E4430, and in the HAZMART, building E5185. You may also set up a collection point in your office. After P2 Week, just call the P2 Program office at 410-306-2273 and we will pick up the collected disks. If any disks you wish to recycle contain sensitive information, simply reformat the disks or delete sensitive files prior to recycling.

There are additional opportunities to learn more about pollution prevention during National P2 Week here on the installation. You can check out the P2 display in the PX lobby, or enjoy pollution prevention training in the comfort of your own office. Just call the P2 Program office to set up a time when we can come and provide training to you. We offer classes on P2 and the Chesapeake Bay, P2 in Laboratories, Offices, and Maintenance Shops, Affirmative Procurement (Buy Recycled), How to Use the Hazardous Inventory Tracking System, How to Read an MSDS, and basic environmental science classes.

For more information about this article or for training, please call the P2 Program office at 410-306-2273.