

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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What Kind of Greeting Are You Sending?

Remember the days when you went searching for the perfect greeting card to give to a special person for a special occasion? Your choices were simple: a paper card that was serious or funny with words and/or pictures. The card was kept for sentimental reasons or hopefully recycled rather than thrown in the trash. Now, thanks to technology, we have the choice of talking, singing, even dancing musical greeting cards! These cards may be kept longer than a plain old paper card, but eventually the batteries wear out and the fun fades away.

Then what do you do with the card? Throw it out? Try to recycle it? Have you ever actually taken one of those cards apart to see what they contain? Whoa! Depending on the card, there can be a number of components inside. Some of the components that make those cards sing and dance include the following.

- Batteries – There may be up to three batteries per card, which may or may not contain mercury. The mercury batteries contain as much as 5mg of mercury – more mercury than in a compact fluorescent light bulb! Mercury is harmful to human health and is highly toxic to wildlife. Most of the mercury released to the atmosphere comes from the burning of mercury-containing garbage—like greeting cards with mercury batteries--and the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas to provide energy.
- Speakers – The card has one to two speakers that contain combinations of metals, plastic and magnets. (They DO make good refrigerator magnets, however!)
- Circuit boards – These boards are comprised of resistors, capacitors, lead solder, plastics and metals.
- LED lights and the wires that go to them – These are what ensure the disco ball lights up!
- Unidentifiable pieces of plastic – This enables a paper hamster to dance.

As you can see, these electronic cards contain a whole lot more than just a pleasant greeting, they could contain hazardous waste. If you receive one of these cards and discover mercury containing batteries (look for a Hg symbol on the battery), please contact your local transfer station for proper disposal. The paper can be recycled, but the rest, unfortunately, must go in the trash – what a waste!

The next time you need a card for that special someone, think about the environmental impact. Maybe the person receiving the greeting would enjoy a real live song or dance instead of all that waste to manage! For more information on the effects of mercury on the environment, please see www.des.nh.gov .