For Immediate Release

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LESS THAN 1% OF USED CELL PHONES RECOVERED BY LEADING U.S. PHONE COLLECTION PROGRAMS – MILLIONS GO TO LANDFILLS OR INCINERATORS

New Study Recommends Ways to Make Cell Phone Collection, Reuse and Recycling Effective to Reduce Toxic Waste and Make Money

New York, NY – November 24, 2003 – A new report by the national environmental research organization INFORM, *Calling All Cell Phones: Collection, Reuse and Recycling Programs in the US*, reveals that leading cell phone collection programs have recovered less than 1 percent of phones retired and discarded since 1999. Approximately 2.5 million phones were collected from 1999 to early 2003 by the programs studied, leaving hundreds of millions more to enter the waste stream.

Calling All Cell Phones' research indicates an estimated 100 million cell phones, weighing approximately 50,000 tons, will be retired this year alone. An additional surge in this toxic waste flow is expected to follow the cell phone number portability rule (effective today) as millions of consumers change wireless services and discard their incompatible cell phones.

Cell phone collection programs are the focus of this new report because INFORM found them to be the primary strategy in the US for dealing with the rapidly escalating cell phone waste problem researched in its groundbreaking 2002 report, *Waste in the Wireless World*. **"**At current rates of recovery, hundreds of millions of used cell phones will soon wind up in landfills or incinerators where they'll release arsenic, lead, cadmium, and many other toxic materials that threaten human health and the environment," said Eric Most, author of the new report. "Existing US collection programs are making steps in the right direction, but they're operating at a scale and scope that is dwarfed by the monumental size of the problem."

Calling All Cell Phones focused on four of the leading programs in the country, including the Wireless Foundation's "Donate a Phone" programs, The HopeLine Program (run by Verizon Wireless), CollectiveGood International, and The Charitable Recycling Program.

Although the programs are not making a real impact on cell phone waste, *Calling All Cell Phones* found they are contributing significantly in another way. Since 1999, the collection programs studied have donated $6.5 million -- from the sale of refurbished phones and recyclable materials -- to charities. Uncollected used cell phones represent lost potential revenue for both collection programs and the many charities that receive donations from them.

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Bette Fishbein, INFORM Senior Fellow, author of *Waste In the Wireless World* and advisor to the new report, said: "With increased effectiveness, the collection programs could give more and also have more revenue to invest in growth and expansion."

Calling All Cell Phones offers specific recommendations for making collection programs effective. Recommendations address the program operators as well as cell phone manufacturers and policy makers.

Recommendations to Collection Program Operators:

- **Programs need to offer convenient, permanent drop-off sites.** High-traffic locations within communities, such as shopping malls, supermarkets, banks, and post offices could be drop-off sites.

- **Temporary drives must be replaced by permanent collection systems.** Especially in the case of ubiquitous retail locations like RadioShack (a Donate a Phone program partner), which has about 7100 stores nationwide, on-going collections could make a real difference in recovery rates.

- **Programs need to be broadly and aggressively publicized.** Wireless providers and the cell phone collection programs themselves need to leverage advertising and public relations to spread the word about the importance of cell phone reuse and recycling. Ad campaigns and expanded media coverage would increase public awareness of the programs and highlight their value. Aggressive in-store promotions for phone collections at retail outlets, highlighting of collection programs in wireless providers' service plan ads, and inclusion of collection information with new phones sales and phone bills would all increase participation.

- **Financial incentives are needed to enlist large-scale participation.** To motivate more people to donate their phones, program participants with retail outlets should offer product discounts and rebates to customers bringing in phones. These offers, which have proven effective, are rarely used. In the case of programs that recover significant numbers of phones through direct donations, participation could be increased by providing free shipping in all cases, regardless of quantity.

- **Cell phone collection and reuse programs must take physical or fiscal responsibility for the cell phones they export.** Responsibility for cell phones when they become waste is crucial because nearly two-thirds of used phones are sold abroad for reuse or recycling. They often go to developing countries where there is little or no infrastructure for proper handling of them at end of life. Phones sent abroad should be returned to the US for reuse and recycling, or systems need to be established that enable these phones to be collected, reused, and recycled abroad. Revenues generated from the sale of refurbished phones and recyclable materials could be used to cover the costs of this infrastructure.

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Recommendations to Manufacturers:

- **Design of standardized components would allow for interchangeability among different makes and models of phone.** When a phone can use many types of battery, adapter, or other accessory, finding a replacement can be done more quickly and easily.

- **Simplification of internal software would expedite refurbishing**. Resetting a phone's internal software is one of the most time-consuming and difficult parts of the refurbishing process.

- **Reduction of the toxic constituents in cell phones would make them more recyclable.** Cell phones manufactured with alternatives to brominated flame retardants and beryllium-copper would reduce contamination problems and improve worker safety.

- **Standardization and labeling of plastics and batteries would facilitate both refurbishment and recycling.** Since different brands of cell phone contain different plastics and battery types**,** this would make sorting and replacing them more cost-efficient.

Recommendations to Government Policy Makers:

- **Policies or programs involving the principle of "extended producer responsibility" (EPR) would motivate manufacturers to make the simple design changes that facilitate recycling and reuse.** Since toxic contaminants hinder recycling, EPR could give manufacturers a strong incentive to design their cell phones with fewer toxic components. The EU's *Directive on the Restriction of the Use of Certain Hazardous Substances in Electrical and Electronic Equipment* (RoHS Directive) calls for the substitution of toxic substances with safer alternatives, which could increase the profitability of recycling electronic equipment such as cell phones. (Note: the WEEE Directive establishes a cell phone recycling/reuse target of 65 percent by the end of 2006, and the (RoHS Directive) requires the elimination of toxic substances, such as mercury, lead, and certain brominated flame retardants, from all electrical and electronic equipment, also by 2006. All manufacturers wishing to sell their products in any of the EU's 15 member states must meet all the requirements of both directives by the dates specified.).

- **Landfill bans on cell phones would increase the number of phones flowing into collection programs.** Legislation requiring municipalities to create systems for recovering, refurbishing, and recycling used phones would make such bans even more effective. Revenues generated from the sale of recovered phones could help fund these municipal programs.
- **Mandated public reporting on the collection and end use of refurbished phones and recyclable materials would provide valuable information allowing government officials and the public to track the effectiveness of cell phone collection and reuse programs.**
- **Targets for cell phone collection, reuse, and recycling would give the wireless industry an incentive to improve program efficiency.** These targets, like those set for reducing the toxic constituents in cell phones, would give all cell phone manufacturers an incentive to design for reuse and recycling. Such targets are a component of "extended producer responsibility" policies now in effect in Europe and elsewhere.

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"US cell phone programs and manufacturers can be competitive, responsible actors in the global marketplace if they adopt this report's recommendations," said Joanna Underwood, president of INFORM. "Making such changes will enable their cell phones to meet the kind of goals being developed worldwide such as by the Basel Convention's 2002 Initiative for a Sustainable Partnership on Environmentally Sound Management of End-of-Life Mobile Phones, and the EU's directives to minimize cell phone waste and toxic components. For the environment and the economy, why not be proactive?"

For full text of the report, see www.informinc.org/media/index.php.

INFORM, Inc. is a national environmental research organization, based in New York City, which identifies practical ways of living and doing business that ensure environmentally sustainable economic growth. For over a decade, INFORM has been a leader in the study of closed-loop materials systems and the application of extended producer responsibility (EPR), a policy approach designed to hold manufacturers responsible for their products at end of life. INFORM has published more than 100 reports on how to avoid unsafe uses of toxic chemicals, protect land and water resources, conserve energy, and safeguard public health. Its publications are used by businesses, policy makers, schools, and communities to implement strategies for preventing waste at it source.

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