Distributors Aim to Recycle Thermostats

By Kyle Gargaro Of Distribution Center

Being the Big Man on Campus might not have worked well for Manti Te’o, but being the Big Man on the Planet (BMOP) is a goal for a lot of distributors across the country. That is because Thermostat Recycling Corp. (TRC) and HARDI recently launched the 2013 BMOP competition. The competition will run through Oct. 31 and HARDI members can enter by signing up at www.thermostat-recycle.org/BMOP to receive free promotional materials. BMOP encourages HARDI members to promote TRC’s mercury thermostat collection program at their branches nationwide to recover the most thermostats. Winners will be chosen by TRC and recognized at HARDI’s annual conference.

“TRC and HARDI launched Big Man on the Planet in 2012 in an effort to build awareness and participation of the program,” said TRC executive director Mark Tibbetts. “BMOP taps into the competitive nature of HARDI members and encourages HARDI members to actively promote the mercury thermostat collection program at their branch locations to compete for bragging rights of being the best at preventing mercury pollution.”

Last year, Johnson Supply of Houston was the inaugural winner. The distributor beat out USAir Conditioning Distributors in City of Industry, Calif., by less than one tenth of a pound of mercury.

TRC Established to ensure the proper disposal of waste mercury thermostats, TRC program accomplishes this by providing a free recycling solution to HVAC contractors nationwide. TRC began operations in seven states in 1998 and expanded nationally to all states (except Alaska and Hawaii) in 2002 following the adoption of regulations that allow the program to operate.

The short term goal of the group is to continue to increase participation in the program by raising its visibility and improving access by increasing the number of collection sites. The long term goal of the group is to recycle as many mercury thermostats as possible.

Tibbetts and his group recognize the importance of thermostat recycling.

“Each thermostat contains between three and 16 grams of mercury, which is why it is very important they are not disposed of in the trash due to the toxicity of mercury,” he said. “If thrown in the trash, the mercury may get into the environment and pollute our waterways. To put it in perspective, there is at least 1,000 times more mercury in a thermostat than a compact fluorescent lightbulb.”

In addition to bringing awareness and making it easy to recycle thermostats, TRC also spends a
portion of its time focused on legislation at both the national and state level.

Currently, nine states require contractors and technicians to recycle every mercury thermostat they remove from service, and all HVAC wholesalers with facilities in these states must accept mercury thermostats for recycling at no cost. An additional four states prohibit the disposal of mercury thermostats in the trash. Similar legislation has been proposed in several additional states.

“TRC works with its member companies and industry groups like HARDI, Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA), Air-Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration Institute (AHRI), and the National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA) in an effort to develop public policies that facilitate and support its mission. However, the best solution for the HVAC industry is to support the voluntary TRC program and make it as successful as possible,” Tibbetts said.

He is also quick to point out that the distributors are a vital part of the process.

“Without distributors, TRC has no ready means of collecting thermostats. The program relies on distributors acting as collection sites and their efforts to make the program visible at each of their locations in order to succeed,” Tibbetts said. “We can’t say enough positive things about HARDI’s support. TRC entered into a formal agreement with HARDI in 2011 in an effort to raise the visibility of the TRC program among HARDI members and to assist HARDI members in understanding and complying with the array of mercury thermostat laws and regulations in the U.S. This partnership with HARDI, and the visibility it has given the TRC program, has resulted in hundreds of new collection sites nationwide.”

For more information, visit www.thermostat-recycle.org.

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Michael Winn
President