

## Keep your computer from joining millions in landfill

Australia has a growing mountain of electronic waste or e-waste, including computers, mobile phones, TVs, VCRs, stereos, copiers, scanners, printers, fax machines and other electronic devices.

Yet electronic devices contain reusable components and valuable materials which can be recycled.

A survey published in 2010, established that current demand for electronic recycling and reuse services was over 4 million units per year. That is equivalent to around 25,000 tonnes each year.<sup>1</sup>

Electronic waste in Australia is estimated to be growing at more than three times the rate of domestic waste from households and other council waste.

As part of its new product stewardship legislative framework, the Australian government intends implementing 'regulation to support an industry-led scheme' that will collect and recycle televisions and computers.<sup>2</sup>



Photo: Kathy Giunta

### Real gold in e-waste

Electronic waste contains many valuable, recoverable materials such as aluminium, steel and copper. Things like printed circuit boards, cabling, glass and plastics can be used to produce new products.

More than 90 per cent of the material in mobile phones, for example, can be recovered and used for new products. The nickel is recovered for stainless steel products; the small amounts of gold or silver can be reused in jewellery; and the plastics used to make fence posts, pallets and other products.

Be aware some equipment may contain toxic or hazardous components. With all electronic waste and used batteries, some care should be taken with disposal. Seek advice from the manufacturers or a reliable source before recycling.

### Simple ways to cut electronic waste costs

Think in terms of the waste hierarchy. How can you avoid, reduce, reuse or recycle electronic waste?

- Avoid** → **Do we need it?**
- Reduce** → **Do we need so much?**
- Reuse** → **Can we use it again?**
- Recycle** → **Can someone else use it or convert it into something new?**

1 Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, National Television and Computer Product Stewardship scheme (2010). *A Study of Australia's Current and future E-waste Recycling Infrastructure Capacity and Needs*. <http://www.environment.gov.au/settlements/waste/publications/pubs/ewaste-infrastructure.pdf>

2 Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, National Television and Computer Product Stewardship scheme (2010). *National Television and Computer Product Stewardship Scheme*. <http://www.environment.gov.au/settlements/waste/ewaste/publications/pubs/fs-ewaste.pdf>



## AVOID

Avoid future e-waste with smart purchasing and good maintenance. Before purchasing a new electronic product, think of its potential end-of-life disposal requirements. Consider making extended producer responsibility (EPR) a condition of your purchase agreement, so that the supplier agrees to take responsibility for disposal of the product at end of life.

Here are some more tips:

- Avoid items that require ongoing use of batteries. Try to purchase items that have the option of selecting electric power instead of batteries. If a unit requires batteries, purchase a charger and rechargeable batteries.
- Better quality equipment may indeed present greater value in that it will last longer. In the long term this may be a better purchase if it requires less servicing and less frequent refills and so uses less packaging.
- Consider leasing, so the responsibility for proper disposal remains with the company that supplies the product.



## REDUCE

Maintain your equipment in good condition as this will extend its life and reduce the need to replace it prematurely.

Avoid supplying individual work spaces with dedicated electronic equipment, used by only a few people. More sophisticated printers and scanners can be shared amongst staff using wireless networking systems. This can provide greater efficiency and may also reduce the amount of printer consumables.



## REUSE

Do not let idle or outdated electronic goods sit around unused. By passing this equipment on quickly for reuse or recycling you may reduce the need for someone else to purchase a new electronic device or parts.



## RECYCLE

Go to **BusinessRecycling.com.au** and look under Electrical Equipment for suitable electronic waste recycling service. Not all electronic waste is the same, so ask contractors what can and cannot be recycled.

Here are some more tips:

- Check the recycler's reputation and their environmental certification.
- For disposal of mobile phones and batteries visit Mobile Muster **www.mobilemuster.com.au** for your nearest collection point. Do not place mobile phones in the general rubbish bin.
- Batteries may contain valuable but potentially dangerous metals such as lithium, nickel, lead, cadmium and cobalt. Find companies that will accept batteries at **BusinessRecycling.com.au**.

### For further information

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