

E-Waste

## How To Recycle Your Old Electronics

Lindsey Hoshaw, 04.01.10

With mobile phones that cost less than a new pair of tennis shoes and plasma TVs selling for under \$500, buying the latest tech gadget has never been easier.

But getting rid of appliances is problematic--and the toxic chemicals inside them are a significant source of environmental pollution. Each year the U.S. produces 2.25 million tons of electronic waste--only 18% of which is recycled, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

E-waste should be processed separately from landfill garbage because it contains toxic chemicals including mercury, lead, cadmium and arsenic that can leak into the ground and contaminate drinking water. The unfortunate solution: Up to 60% of e-waste is exported to developing countries like China, India and Pakistan where it's less expensive to process. Then it is often sold on the commodities market and turned into new products like jewelry, garden furniture and license plates, which are shipped back to the U.S. This process, however, is highly unregulated and children often dig through piles of hazardous material to sell scrap metal to feed their families.

It may seem near impossible to prevent e-waste from wreaking environmental havoc, but consumers have many options. They include recycling, donating and selling their old gear. "People need to make sure they're taking things to a certified e-recycler," says Ken Beyer, chief executive of CloudBlue, a company in Alpharetta, Ga., that manages e-waste disposal. Beyer says companies like his keep recycled material in the U.S. and make sure e-waste handlers are protected from toxic pollutants. Earth911 is another credible e-waste specialist. It works this way: You type in your ZIP code online, specify what type of product you want to turn in and then the Web site gives you a list of local recycling centers.

You can also take your recyclables directly back to the retailer or manufacturer. Office Depot, Costco, Staples, Apple and Verizon are among a handful of stores that accept used products. Office Depot sells small, medium and large boxes for \$5, \$10 and \$15 and agrees to recycle anything you can fit inside them. Try calling your local hardware store, too; they'll often take back old batteries.

If donating is the way you want to go, there are organizations that will ship computers to developing countries or mail the proceeds from used cell phones to soldiers overseas. Close the Gap, a Belgian nonprofit organization, provides a similar service in Africa--with a focus on education. It sends laptops and desktops to schools and hospitals in Swaziland and South Africa.

Cell Phones for Soldiers, a nonprofit started by two teenage siblings in Norwell, Mass., who wanted to help soldiers call home, collects cellphones and takes the money it gets from selling them to buy pre-paid calling cards for the American military in Iraq. Goodwill also accepts used electronics and Recycling for Charities and CollectiveGood give cellphones and computers to participating charities of your choice.

If you're looking to sell your old electronics, Amazon and eBay are good backups, but a few e-recycling Web sites are worth checking out first. Cell for Cash, TechForward, MyBoneYard, BuyMyTronics and Gazelle will give you an estimate before you agree to sell your old device, but prices vary widely from site to site. BuyMyTronics.com offered \$205 for a damaged 3G 32MB iPhone while MyBoneYard offered \$59.

With a little research you can make sure your old phone gets a new home. Or that your trash becomes someone else's treasure.

## In Pictures: How To Recycle Your Old Electronics



Each year the U.S. produces 2.25 million tons of electronic waste. Only 18% of it is recycled, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. It's not for lack of options. Here are ways to recycle 10 of the most common electronic gadgets.



### eReaders

The Environmental Protection Agency has no current estimate of how many eReaders--such as the Kindle or Sony's Reader--will be reused or recycled. However, many nonprofit recycling organizations have started accepting them as the devices become more popular. Schools or charities are most likely to accept the devices if they're in good working condition. Sales for all portable reading devices topped \$431 million last year.



### **Digital Cameras**

Many chains like Best Buy and CircuitCity have started taking back used digital cameras. Some manufacturers even accept old products. Sony, for example, has vowed to create drop-off centers within 20 miles of nearly every U.S. citizen within a few years.



### **iPods/MP3 players**

If you have the headphones and original packaging that go with your iPod or MP3 player, Web sites like MyBoneYard or BuyMyTronics may pay as much as a few hundred dollars for your old iPod (assuming it's in great condition). Prices vary greatly from site to site so it's worth shopping around.



### **Mobile phones**

Cellphones are the easiest electronics to donate. Because they're lightweight and portable, they're easy to ship anywhere in the world. Robbie and Brittany Bergquist, who started Cell Phones for Soldiers, collect old phones, sell them and use the money to buy prepaid calling cards for U.S. troops in Iraq.



### **TVs**

Televisions are a common site at landfills because retailers and manufacturers often don't accept them. Try Earth911 or E-Cycling Central to find nearby drop-off centers or donation sites. You may even be able to arrange curbside pickup through your city's recycling provider.



### **Fax machines/VCRs**

Depending on where you live, bulkier items like fax machines, videogame consoles and VCRs can often be left on the curb for pick up. Web sites like [Ecyyclingcentral.com](http://Ecyyclingcentral.com) and [Earth911](http://Earth911) will tell you which companies will come directly to your door to collect old electronics.



### **Computers**

Computer take-back programs have become so prevalent that companies like HP, Dell, Acer, Apple and Sony all accept used PCs. Most manufacturers will take back your old computer for free but some require you to purchase a new product first. If this is the case they'll often accept your old computer for a small fee, usually not more than \$30.



### **Batteries**

Batteries contain lead, cadmium and mercury and are some of the most toxic types of e-waste. They're also some of the easiest to recycle. Many hardware or electronic stores will take back disposable batteries. Car batteries are accepted at most auto repair shops.



### **Printers**

Retailers like Best Buy, CircuitCity, OfficeMax and Office Depot will accept used printers along with other old hardware like computers or fax machines. For \$15 Office Depot will accept anything, up to 60 lbs. in weight that you can fit in their large e-recycling box.



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### **Shredded e-waste**

Electronics contain materials like glass, gold, silver, copper, aluminum, plastic and other components that can be extracted and reused. The metal from computers is often ground down and melted to make new products like clocks, picture frames and license plates.