



ELECTRONIC WASTE

The E-waste Crisis

Australians generate an enormous volume of e-waste each year, throwing away valuable resources which can be recycled and contaminating landfills with toxic waste. There will be 234 million items of e-waste in landfill in Australia by the end of 2009. This equates to 88 000 tonnes of televisions and computers dumped in landfill each year, creating 484 000 tonnes of green house gas emissions. Only 4% of mobile phones and 1% of computers and televisions are recycled in Australia. These habits need to change and you can help.

What is e-waste?

E-waste stands for electronic waste. It includes all electronic items from televisions, video players, DVD players, video cameras, mobile phones, computers, laptops, printers, computer game consols, scanners, faxes, digital clocks etc.

Why divert electronic waste from landfill?

Toxicity

E-waste contains a wide variety of toxic chemicals which will leach out in landfills, potentially poisoning the groundwater, damaging our ecosystem and human health.

A mobile phone alone contains 36 chemicals and mined minerals. Ten of these are considered toxic, these include cadmium in the batteries, mercury in the screen, chromium tin the wires, arsenic in the circuit board and lead which is used for soldering.

Resource Depletion

E-waste contains valuable resources, many of which are rare and non-renewable. The landfilling of e-waste is a waste of precious resources which could otherwise be recycled. Ninety nine percent of the materials contained in a computer can be recycled and reused.

Many of the minerals used in electronic goods have extremely low reserves and are close to running out. The remaining global supply of Indium, which is a rare metal used in making flat screen monitors and televisions has only a 10 year supply. Zinc which is essential in cabling, circuit boards, televisions and monitors has only a 30 year global supply remaining.

The current rate at which Australians purchase new electronic items can not be sustained, without a massive change to recycling these items.

Greenhouse gas emissions

When e-waste is buried we lose the chance to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The raw materials that make up electronic items require a lot of energy to extract and refine. This energy and the greenhouse gases emitted through this process, we call embodied energy. If e-waste is sent to landfill then more energy and greenhouse gases are required to mine more virgin materials. If e-waste is recycled then most of the embodied energy is recovered and less energy is required to make the new product.

WHAT CAN I (or our school) DO ABOUT IT?

- Check whether your school has a policy on what happens to electronic items when they have expired;
- Develop an e-waste policy for the school with the assistance of the school's environmental group or as a research project for school;
- Ring 'Mobile Muster' and organise a mobile phone collection box for your school. Arrange with the library to locate the collection box;
- Take advantage of World Environment Day on the 5 June each year or National Recycling Week in November each year to raise awareness of the E-waste Crisis at your school. Ask your local council to send their environment officer out to talk at your school. They may even be able to help you organise a collection on the day;
- Let your own family know about separating e-waste for recycling. Check with your council to see where your nearest e-waste recycling facility is and next time your parents take a trip to the dump, take your e-waste along to the collection facility.



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MORE INFORMATION

Total Environment Centre: Advocacy Action Information

www.tec.org.au

Commissioned to research and report on Australia's E-waste position in 2008 and then provide updates in 2009. These reports titled, "Tipping Point: Australia's E-waste Crisis" are available from their website.

Planet Ark Recycling

www.recyclingnearyou.com.au

Allows you to search for local recycling information either by council area or product type.

Mobile Muster

www.mobilemuster.com.au

Have a school recycling challenge with prizes for the top school that collects mobile phones for recycling. The program also fundraises to preserve and restore endangered bandicoot habitat.

1800EWASTE

www.ewaste.com.au

Online e-waste information service. Find out where your nearest e-waste collection service is located.

North East Waste Forum

www.northeastwasteforum.org.au

Most local councils in the NEWF region have permanent e-waste collection facilities at their landfill sites. Household quantities are free in most council areas. For business quantities of e-waste check with your local council for fees.