



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION III- OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
1650 Arch Street Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103-2029
Phone - 215/814-5100 Fax - 215/814-5102

EPA Environmental News

Contact: Donna Heron 215-814-5113 / heron.donna@epa.gov

eCycling. Or how to dispose of your old, unwanted electronics

PHILADELPHIA (December 26, 2007) – Now that your family has opened the new computers, I-phones, DVD players and televisions, what are you going to do with the old stuff?

Donating used (but still operating) electronics for reuse extends the lives of valuable products and keeps them out of the waste stream for a longer period of time. Reuse, in addition to being an environmentally preferable alternative, also benefits society. By donating your used electronics, you allow schools, nonprofit organizations, and lower-income families to obtain equipment that they otherwise could not afford.

Before donating your computer or other electronics, make sure the equipment is reusable. Donation-organizations have limited or in many cases no resources and employees to diagnose and repair hardware. A functional, working system—especially with monitor, wiring, and software licenses—is a lot more useful and requires less upgrading than a nonworking, incomplete computer. Check to see what the donation organization's minimum computer requirements are (e.g., Pentium processor, Windows 95). Donation-organizations might not accept (or might charge a fee for) older, less useful equipment (e.g., 386 processors, dot matrix printers, less than 14 inch color monitors).

As a business, you might be able to take advantage of tax incentives for computer equipment donations. The 21st Century Classrooms Act encourages large companies to donate computer equipment to public and private schools. When donating equipment to a nonprofit organization, inquire about documentation that can be applied toward your income tax return. The most appropriate donation organization for computers can vary from area to area. In some cases, the most viable donation organization might be a charity, but in other areas, the appropriate donation organization might be the local school district or materials exchange.

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Broken electronics and computers too outdated to donate can be recycled. Computer monitors and older television picture tubes can pollute the environment if not recycled or disposed of properly. Check with your product's manufacturer to see if they will take back or trade in your product for recycling - - many manufacturers do, including Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Apple, Toshiba and Sony. See if your retailer has an in-store collection program or if they are hosting an electronics collection event. Cingular, Best Buy, and Staples offer ongoing in-store collection of used cell phones, and Best Buy and Staples sometimes host collection events. Local governments often collect electronics as part of their household hazardous waste management program.

For specific suggestions on where to recycle, go to <http://www.epa.gov/reg3wcmd/eCycling/eCyclingcollections.htm>. In addition to specific locations in your state that accept electronics for recycling and reuse, you will also find information on everything you need to know about eCycling.

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