

5 ways to reduce e-waste at home

Take home sheet



Did you know we each throw away 21kg of e-waste every year? That's more than an average seven-year-old boy weighs! But what should you do with your waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) when it's no longer needed – and how can you cut the amount of e-waste you create in the first place?

Here are our five top tips for tackling WEEE at home:

1. Do you need to upgrade?

The constant stream of software updates and shiny new technology appearing in the shops puts pressure on all of us to feel we must upgrade our devices to the latest all-singing, all-dancing version. But before you open your wallet... Stop! Ask yourself: do you really need to buy the latest gadget or upgrade your system? Does your device still work? Could it be improved or repaired instead (by buying additional memory, perhaps, or having a service)? On average, people upgrade their mobile phone every 18 months¹ and their laptop every three years² – but what do you think happens to everyone's old gadgets when they're no longer wanted?

STUDENT EXERCISE: Do a five-minute dash around your home and tally up how many old and unwanted electrical items you can find abandoned in drawers and cupboards. Compare your results – are you surprised by your findings?

2. Be a savvy shopper

If everyone put pressure on manufacturers to use recycled electronics in their electrical products – by actively buying items that only contain recycled materials or which are built to last a lifetime – they'd soon sit up and start listening. For many brands, their recycling policies have already become one of their selling points. For example, Dualit toasters have fully replaceable or repairable parts so the toaster lasts a lifetime. Dell incorporates plastics from electronics recovered through its recycling scheme into plastics used to make new Dell products. Meanwhile, Fairphone calls itself the world's first 'ethical smartphone' as it has been built from ethically sourced minerals and the phone has been put together in such a way that it can be taken apart easily for repairs.

STUDENT EXERCISE: Research online the recycling policies of some popular electronics manufacturers. Write a letter to each of them highlighting the problem of e-waste and asking what they're doing to help.

Waste Week



collections. If the appliances still work, you could try selling them through local listings or auction websites. There are lots of reuse networks too – like Freecycle and Freegle – if you are happy to give your unwanted items away for free. Just remember to erase your personal data thoroughly from any devices before handing them over.

STUDENT EXERCISE: Are there any charities near you collecting electrical equipment who might be looking for volunteers? Or how about putting together a business proposal for your school to collect unwanted electrical items on behalf of a local charity?

5. Recycle, recycle, recycle

The next best thing to passing on your unloved electrical stuff is recycling it. If you're replacing an item like-for-like, check to see if the seller will take back your old item for recycling, either instore or as they deliver your new item, as most have an obligation to do so under WEEE legislation. Some retailers like Currys will take back any will take back any electrical item for reuse or recycling in store, even if you didn't buy it from them. Failing that, your trusted local household reuse and recycling centre (formerly known as 'the tip'), are great for taking your large white goods to be recycled, like fridges and washing machines, as well as all other electricals.

Recycle Your Electricals

STUDENT EXERCISE: Make some posters encouraging everyone to reuse or recycle their unloved electrical goods. Display them around school or turn it into a competition and ask a local recycling organisation to pick the winning entry.

DID YOU KNOW?

If WEEE makes its way into landfill, the toxic chemicals and metals can be hazardous to our health and the environment.

3. Repair your broken devices

Just because an appliance or gadget is broken, it doesn't mean it's destined for the scrap heap! There are plenty of technical repair specialists who will help you out whether you've smashed the screen of your mobile phone, cracked the case of your tablet or dropped your laptop and damaged the hard drive. So before you stow your damaged device away in a cupboard – or worse, throw it in the bin – find out whether it can be economically repaired first.

STUDENT EXERCISE: Pick five popular gadgets (e.g. a smartphone) and give each one a fault (e.g. cracked screen). Do a quick search online to find a repair specialist for each fault and make a note of how much each repair costs.

4. Pass it onto somebody else

Passing on any unwanted electrical items is a good way of making sure your WEEE stays out of landfill and also reduces the demand for manufacturers to make new products. The good news is there are plenty of organisations happy to take your old or unwanted electrical items! Secondhand furniture stores and charities (like the British Heart Foundation) often take working electrical goods, with many happy to collect from your door. Your school might even run their own