Meet the awe-inspiring WEEE MAN

This 7-metre tall figure is made of 3.3 tonnes of discarded electrical equipment and household goods. That's the amount of e-waste the average person in the UK will throw away in their lifetime!

WHERE DID HE COME FROM?

The WEEE Man was commissioned in 2005 by the RSA (the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce) to draw attention to the problem of e-waste. At the time, most electrical waste went straight to landfill because the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive hadn't yet been published. This came into effect in 2006 and made manufacturers and retailers responsible for recycling e-waste for the first time.

WHAT IS HE MADE OF?

Large household appliances: 5 fridges, 1 cooker and hob, 6 electric heaters, 1 air filter, 3 washing machines, 6 microwaves, 5 fans

Small household appliances: 12 kettles, 3 whisks, 7 vacuum cleaners, 5 sandwich toasters, 2 food mixers, 8 toasters, 8 irons, 3 electric knives

IT and telecommunications equipment: 7 PC screens, 4 keyboards, 8 CPUs, 23 computer mice, 15 printers, 35 mobile phones

Consumer equipment: 6 TVs, 5 radios, 3 video recorders, 2 stereos, 1 DVD player, 3 satellite dishes

Electrical and electronic tools: 1 sewing machine, 1 strimmer, 1 drill, 4 lawn mowers, 1 sander

Toys, leisure and sports equipment: 1 PlayStation

"I designed him to look like he's dragging himself out of landfill, coming back from the dead. He's there to remind us of this monster that we're creating when we dump these goods rather than recycle them."

Paul Bonomini, Creator of the WEEE Man

HOME APPLIANCES

The WEEE Man was designed to reflect as closely as possible the proportion of e-waste generated by households from each of the 10 categories covered by the WEEE Directive. It's why a lot of bigger items (like fridges and washing machines) feature in the WEEE man, as most household WEEE by weight comes from these types of appliances.

MOBILE PHONES

When the WEEE Man was created we replaced 15 million mobile phones every year. Fast forward to the present day and over 28 million mobile phones were sold in the past year alone, and an estimated 90 million mobiles are in circulation in the UK – yet less than 5% are recycled. Why do you think this is?

DID YOU KNOW?

The WEEE Man sculpture is now permanently installed at the Eden Project in Cornwall.

CONSUMER EQUIPMENT

Today's TVs are digital and flat screen, VCRs have been replaced by DVD players, and wifi speakers have superseded old-style stereos, yet still recycling this type of equipment remains a big problem. Every year in the UK we discard two million TV sets – with most going to landfill. But most of the components that go into making a TV – like the glass screen – can be recycled and reused fairly easily. Why do you think we don't recycle more?

COMPUTER EQUIPMENT

While the IT equipment we use today is likely to be more energy efficient than it was in 2005, our appetite for buying new technology shows no signs of slowing down. Last year, computer sales were up 14% on the previous year, and popular new gadgets – like tablets and 'phablets' – didn't even exist when the WEEE Man was created.

WHAT WOULD YOUR WEEE MAN BE LIKE?

The WEEE Man is made up of components that reflect the amount of e-waste you're likely to gather during your lifetime. But how different do you think the WEEE Man might look if you based his composition on a child of your age? Take a look at www.weeeman.org/html/impact/boy.html to see what gadgets a typical 14-year-old boy would have owned in 2005, then work out what might be on your list in 2016. Why not draw your own WEEE Boy or Girl based on the results?

HOW BIG WOULD THE WEEE MAN BE TODAY?

In 2005, WEEE was the fastest growing waste sector in the EU, and UK homes generated about one million tonnes of WEEE. Today, WEEE is still the fastest growing waste sector and we now create about 1.5 million tonnes of WEEE a year, equivalent to 23.5kg a year per person. Based on these statistics, how much bigger do you think the WEEE Man would be today?

Sources: www.edenproject.com/visit/whats-here/giant-sculpture-made-of-waste; www.weeeman.org/html/impact/facts.html; www.hse.gov.uk/waste/waste-electrical.htm; www.recycleopedia.com/recycling-facts-info/how-mobile-and-cell-phones-are-recycled; www.weeeman.org/html/press/soundbites.html; www.channelweb.co.uk/crn-uk/research/2398731/uk-pc-sales-bounce-back-in-2014; www.weeeman.org/html/what/index.html; www.step-initiative.org/Overview_United_Kingdom.html

Learn more about WEEE at jointhepod.org

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