

An Environmentally Aware Method of Disposing of Used Computer Technology

You're probably here because you're looking for ways to equip your business with [affordable technology in a downturn](#), or you'd like to [dispose of technology](#) that your organization can no longer use. Both of these reasons are commendable and display superb business sense. But did you know that there's another very important reason why it's a good idea to buy or sell used technology or at the very least seek responsible eWaste disposal?

Unease is increasing about the impact all this technology is having on our environment when it becomes obsolete and has to be discarded. When you consider that in our age of high-disposability, many irresponsible companies are ditching equipment that is still usable, adding to the already overpowering burden that technical waste is having on our environment.

Two critical issues are:

- How can technical waste impact the environment?
- What can we do to ensure responsible ewaste disposal?

Technical Waste (eWaste) and the Environment

Simply put, if you bring in a professional computer liquidator like [Andover CG](#) when you're done with your equipment, you're doing the planet a favor. This kind of environmentally-preferred purchasing (sorry, [government-speak](#) there) is kind to our environment as well as to the economy and cash-strapped business startups.

First let's take a look at the consequences for all of us when eWaste is disposed of irresponsibly: eWaste is the fastest growing component of the colossal stream of garbage produced by today's society. While electronic components might seem innocuous enough, many are amazed to find just how dangerous they can be.

So what kind of toxic waste is produced by discarded computers?

Toxins that Come From Technology

Cathode ray tubes (CRTs), which are a component of computers, contain heavy metals such as lead, mercury, barium and cadmium.

These pose a serious threat to human health if they should enter the water system or the food chain. Once they enter the human body they can cause serious damage to the human nervous system causing such serious disorders as paralysis and mental retardation.

[Lead poisoning](#) can cause severe nerve damage, heart damage, kidney damage and reproductive failure. Like most heavy metals lead cannot be excreted by normal body

functions and it can also cross the blood-brain barrier where it lodges permanently in the brain. When young children are exposed to lead they suffer from acute sickness with a wide range of symptoms, and eventually mental retardation. To give you an idea just how toxic lead is, it can continue to be released from bones long after treatment to remove it from the body is finished, requiring periodic spot checks for the presence of lead for some time afterwards.

The constituents of [flame retardant plastic](#), another component of many different items of technology, can also dramatically disrupt the human endocrine system if allowed to [contaminate water](#) (and thus food when the water is used for irrigation for example).

Cadmium is even more dangerous: there is no known medical process for chelating cadmium from the body. Initial signs of [cadmium poisoning](#) include flu-like symptoms, but extreme cadmium poisoning causes lung and kidney failure, and eventually osteomalacia which may be so bad that even body weight will cause fractures.

[Mercury poisoning](#) causes damage to the central nervous system, liver failure. Eventually there will be heart irregularities and peeling of skin.

Why should we be very worried about heavy metal contamination?

Heavy metals by their very nature are difficult, if not impossible, for the human body to process. Regular medicine cannot offer any help with heavy metal poisoning: it's considered irreversible.

The only decontamination regimes available are offered by naturopathic clinics, usually using a process called '[chelation](#),' which is ingestion of a substance known to bind with the poison, so that it is carried out of the body through the normal channels. Many types of [chelation pose risks](#) to human health, though when compared to the serious consequences of damage by heavy metals, lots of patients are prepared to take the risk.

Increasing incidence of diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, autism, cancer and more are attributed by experts to be the result of environmental pollution by heavy metals and other elements.

In California over 6000 computers become 'obsolete' every day of the week.

Multiply this by the days of the year and all the other cities of the US and you begin to get a very worrying picture indeed.

At the moment most [eWaste goes to a landfill](#) somewhere. In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that about 220 million tons of old computers and other tech hardware are trashed in the U.S. every year. This constitutes between 2 and 5 percent of municipal solid waste. According to studies conducted in Europe, eWaste is growing worldwide at a rate of around 3 to 5 percent a year—at least four times faster than the municipal waste stream here in the US.

The question that needs to be asked is ‘is this technology really obsolete, or can some other use be found for it?’

Unlike other countries such as Japan and the European Union, the US as yet doesn't have any eWaste laws to restrict the conditions for disposal of technology. This means that responsible disposal is largely up to the [conscience of users](#).

If you're selling because you're upgrading, think green: make sure a startup company is given the [opportunity of profiting](#) from your no-longer-need technology. Your bottom line will benefit too.

The list of computer and communications technology and hardware that can be recycled or reused is staggering.

- PCs
- Laptops
- Servers
- Business phones

For more on US-Government guidelines for the disposal of eWaste, please see their [PDF on the subject](#).

A Look to the Future of Computer Manufacture and Green Technology

Hopefully, future generations of communications technology and [computers](#) will make use of more environmentally-friendly components, and perhaps even components that can more easily be reused.

It's anyone's guess how long this might take. Here's a [document on the subject of green technology](#) that was written as far back as 2004, with little concrete progress to be seen.

Report on the Dangers of eWaste by Andover CG

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