

Disposing your old PC'S

Imagine where you'd be without your PC. Communications and overall work productivity would plummet for both you personally and your employees.

Now imagine a world where countries are overrun by the dangerous waste from all the old, obsolete computers we no longer want. Landfills packed with tons of cathode-ray tube desktop monitors carrying up to 8 pounds of lead; laptops laden with mercury; circuit boards and other components containing chromium and cadmium and the like, left FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

- That's where we are headed, many government leaders believe, if we don't change our habits now and find safer ways to dispose of the PC hardware and related electronics goods we no longer want. Yes, these are the drawbacks to a world with computers. We don't know yet how to get rid of them yet without some cost to the environment. Fortunately, some people are working on this problem. In the United States alone, 20 million or more PCs became obsolete each year, meaning more than 315 million computers will have been tossed by 2004.
- Computers, TVs and other electronic equipment account for 220 million tons of waste each year in the U.S., of which more than 10% goes straight to landfills (a percentage quickly climbing).

As much as 80% of the PCs and other e-waste collected for recycling in the U.S. happens to end up in Asia — where it is unsafely disposed.

So, what should you do about it? A couple of things:

- **For now:** Don't dump your PC in a dump, or stick it in your garbage. By now, many states may have a law against it anyway (several states including Iowa have various different kinds of e-waste legislation in the works). Check out the reuse and recycle options.
- **For the future:** Support an effort by representatives of hardware manufacturers and other technology companies, state and local governments, environmental organizations and the federal Environmental Protection Agency, among others, to find a nationwide program for dealing with electronic waste. Paying for it is a key issue; an upfront fee, tagged onto the cost of a PC or other electronic device, is may be one answer.

Recycling your old PC now

If your only PC is at a large business where you work, you probably don't have to deal with this. Most corporations and larger businesses sign agreements for the manufacturer to haul their old computers away when investing in new equipment.

But if you are a consumer or run a small business, the onus is on you to find a safe option. Here are your best options:

1. **Donate your computer for reuse.** Offer to family members and friends first, and then, presuming the PC or Mac is usable, to a nonprofit or charitable organization. For the latter, your contribution should be tax-deductible. If you can't find anyone locally, check out the "Recycling and Donation" link at [this site](#) or the "Reuse" link at the Electronics Industry Alliance [Web site](#). Warning: Charitable

organizations have no space for trash. If your PC is not usable, find another option.

2. **Sell to a company for reuse.** Several companies will buy your old computer if it is in good working condition and is not an ancient model.
3. **Recycle through a manufacturer or organization.** IBM, Dell, Hewlett Packard, Gateway and Micron are some of the manufacturers who will take back your old PCs, for a fee.
4. **Dispose through a local household hazardous waste collection program.** Municipalities and local governments will collect or haul away computers for a fee, as part of this program. Just like with the manufacturers, you can be certain these folks will safely dispose of the waste. Again, the [EIA site](#) offers a good rundown of local offerings, as does the [EPA site](#) (see "recycling" pages). But the fee is troubling to those in government — they call it a "disincentive" for people to recycle. They'd rather have the fee upfront. More below.
5. **Pay extra for a manufacturer to take away your old PCs.** For small businesses, adding on to the cost of purchasing new equipment may be difficult (such costs vary per manufacturer). But if you can swing it, relieving you of the burden of disposal may be worth the money.

Although some recycling or reuse programs may seem costly, the added benefit from this initiative is well worth it, considering the public and environmental health risks associated with this problem. Please feel free to contact the Warren County Environmental Health Department, if you have any questions or concerns that you may have concerning this topic. Thanks for listening.

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