

Technology In Our Lives

Out With The Old: What To Do With Tech Gadgets When They Become “Tech Trash”

(NAPS)—It’s hard to imagine what life was like before gadgets. Cell phones, portable e-mail, digital cameras, gaming systems, notebook computers, flat-panel televisions—the average consumers readily use multiple devices that help them do more, in less time, while making their lives easier and more fun.

Consumer electronics are among the hottest gifts this holiday season. As people trade their old gadgets for their new ones, consumers often wonder how to dispose of their “tech trash.”

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, roughly 2 million tons of “tech trash” enter the U.S. waste stream each year. These materials are not appropriate for the trash can; many contain hazardous waste and, in some cases, they may still contain sensitive personal information. The good news is that many of the materials used in these devices can be recycled, refurbished or even donated to a good cause.

But first, personal information needs to be protected. Before recycling or donating an old computer or external hard drive, consumers should take two simple steps to protect their personal information:

1. Save. Use a flash drive or CD-ROM to capture data that you want to save off the old computer.

2. Clear. Erase your data from the computer’s hard drive and drill holes in it to prevent theft of any sensitive personal information.

Here are a few safe, responsible ways for consumers to get rid of tech trash:

Recycle. To help keep personal devices and other used electronics out of landfills, many companies have started to provide consumers



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with recycling options. For example, over the past seven years, the 800-plus U.S. stores of electronics retailer Best Buy Co., Inc. have offered free recycling kiosks for cell phones, rechargeable batteries, and ink-jet cartridges. The company also offers customers haul-away programs for old televisions and appliances when new purchases are delivered.

Donate. Consumers can donate obsolete technology to various charitable organizations. Check out donation Web sites such as www.freecycle.com (an online auction site of tech donations) and www.perscholas.org, which provides refurbished computers to low-income families at low cost. Some nonprofit organizations, such as Goodwill or the Salvation Army, may accept donations; consumers should call local chapters before dropping off items.

Refurbish. The life of some devices may be extended through upgrades. Adding a memory card to an old computer, for example, can significantly increase its processing speed and data storage capabilities.