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Technology

How to dispose of e-waste in South Africa

The author, Patricia Schroder

E-waste from electrical and electronic appliances and devices is becoming a major problem for South Africa.

According to Gauteng's government website, the country produces around 360 000t of e-waste every year, with the province accounting for 55% of that volume.

Consumers need to be better educated on how to properly dispose of their appliances if we are to avoid an environmental catastrophe.

Be wary of companies that encourage you, the consumer, to take your appliance to a 'smashing centre'

New "extended producer responsibility" (EPR) legislation puts the onus on importers and/or manufacturers of these products to ensure environmentally sound management of their products, which could include recycling. However, the initiative could be severely hampered if consumers don't know what to do with their old appliances.

E-waste comprises most electrical and electronic appliances or devices found in the typical South African household or business. These include domestic appliances, power tools, digital devices and computers, electricity generation and storage devices, lighting, reusable and disposable batteries, and cables.

Such appliances and accessories should never be disposed of in normal refuse bins, dumping grounds or landfills. They are likely to contain materials that are potentially explosive, poisonous or otherwise hazardous to humans and animals, and will contaminate surrounding areas as they break down.

Specialised handling

Additionally, be wary of companies that encourage you, the consumer, to take your appliance to a "smashing centre" to smash the appliance with a bat for fun or for you to release frustration. This is an unhealthy and unsafe practice and is not legal in accordance with the National Environmental Management Waste Act of 2008, and it could result in

finer.

E-waste requires specialised handling, recycling and treatment by suitably qualified persons within safely isolated environments.

In addition, e-waste lost to landfill means that scarce resources that could have been harvested and recycled must now be mined afresh.

Sure, it is easier to throw an old appliance in the municipal bin or skip. Yet, with a little research, consumers will discover alternatives that are far safer and more environmentally responsible.



As EPR becomes entrenched in South African industry and retail, consumer education and involvement will be key to controlling e-waste. It is also imperative that a two-way supply chain is established to ensure that disposal of e-waste is as natural, intuitive and easy as buying an appliance in the first place.

There's still a lot of work to be done towards that end but consumers can contribute now by making full use of the avenues already available to them.

- The author, Patricia Schröder, is spokeswoman for the official producer responsibility organisation, Circular Energy

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