

How to dispose of old appliances and contain the e-waste explosion

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 360 000 tons 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 sort out the problem, says Patricia Schröder, spokesperson for the not-for-profit producer responsibility organisation Circular Energy.

New legislation for extended producer responsibility legislation puts the onus on importers and manufacturers of these products to ensure environmentally sound management of their products which could include recycling. However, the initiative could turn out to be futile if consumers don't know what to do with their old appliances.

What is e-waste?

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, cables and the like.

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

Additionally, be wary of companies that encourage you as the consumer to take you



When our old appliances and devices end up in landfills, valuable resources go to waste instead of being recycled.
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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 it could result in fines, since it is not legal in accordance with the National Environmental Management Waste Act of 2008.

"Therefore, they require specialised handling, recycling and treatment by suitably qualified persons within safely isolated environments," says Schröder.

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

How to dispose of appliances

Of course 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 kind to the environment. Circular Energy offers a dedicated collection service for used or waste electric or

electronic equipment, lighting or lighting equipment, and batteries. You can visit the Circular Energy website (www.circular-energy.org) and navigate to the "click to collect" button to arrange for the collection of your e-waste.

Making appliance disposal intuitive

As extended producer responsibility becomes entrenched in South African industry and retail, consumer education and involvement will be key to controlling e-waste.

It would be helpful if 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," says Schröder.

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