

Managing e-waste: How to dispose of old appliances (/latest-news/electricity-control-latest-news/25175-managing-e-waste-how-to-dispose-of-old-appliances)

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e-Waste from electrical and electronic appliances and devices is becoming a major problem for South Africa. According to the Gauteng government website, the country produces around 360 000 tons of e-waste every year, with the province accounting for 55% of that.

Patricia Schröder, spokesperson for the official producer responsibility organisation (PRO) Circular Energy says, "Consumers need to be better educated on how to dispose of their appliances properly if we are to avoid an environmental catastrophe."

New Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation puts the onus on importers and/or manufacturers of these electrical and electronic products to ensure environmentally sound management of their products – which could include recycling of their products. However, this could be severely hampered if consumers don't know what to do with their old appliances.

What constitutes e-waste?

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

Schröder highlights that such appliances and accessories should never be disposed of in standard refuse bins, dumping grounds or landfills. They are likely to contain materials that are potentially explosive, poisonous or otherwise hazardous to people and animals, and will contaminate the ground and surrounding areas as they break down. Additionally, householders and businesses should be wary of companies that encourage them, as consumers, to take their appliances to a 'smashing centre' or to break an appliance with a bat for fun. This is clearly an unhealthy and unsafe practice and it is not legal in terms of the National Environmental Management Waste Act of 2008 and could result in fines.

"Electrical and electronic appliances require specialised handling, recycling and treatment by



All electrical and electronic devices need to be disposed safely via specialised e-waste facilities.

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suitably qualified organisations, within safely isolated environments," Schröder says. In addition, she notes that e-waste lost to landfill means that scarce resources which could have been harvested and recycled need to be mined afresh.

Responsible disposal

Of course it is easier to throw an old appliance in the municipal bin or skip – but there are alternatives that are far safer and more environmentally responsible. Circular Energy offers a dedicated collection service for used or waste electric or electronic equipment, lighting or lighting equipment, and batteries. From the Circular Energy website, visitors should navigate to the ‘click to collect’ button to arrange for the collection of their e-waste.

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

“There’s still a lot of work to be done towards achieving that but consumers can contribute now by making full use of the avenues already available to them,” says Schröder.

For more information visit: www.circular-energy.org (<http://www.circular-energy.org>)