

*Sustainability Tip #9:*

# Computers



Almost all college students today own or use a computer on a regular basis which is why it is important to know how to save energy and cut back on pollution when using and disposing of yours. Of particular concern are the lead, mercury, cadmium, PVC plastics and other toxins that leach into the ground at the landfill or pollute the air when incinerated. So let's review the options.

**WHAT TO BUY**

First, be sure to get a computer with an Energy Star label, which guarantees that it powers down to 15% of its maximum power use during idle periods. Make sure your monitor and printer have the label too. Choosing energy-saving equipment will not require any compromises in selection or price. Second, consider buying a refurbished machine—a customer return that has been rebuilt to original specifications and retested. It may have a scratch or two, but otherwise should be good as new, and should come with a warranty. Buying a rebuilt model is one way to get a high-powered machine at a significant discount—and keep a computer out of the trash. To learn more, go to the website of the computer maker of your choice.

**HOW TO USE**

- The Energy Star alone isn't a guarantee that a computer will operate efficiently; the power management features have to be enabled. Check to see if the supplier has done so.
- Use screensavers—which do not save energy—sparingly, if at all. They were originally developed to prevent static images from burning into the screen—a function that is no longer necessary. If you still want to run a screensaver to entertain or express yourself, set the screensaver to go on before the monitor goes to sleep.
- Your equipment uses energy even in sleep mode, so turn it off at the end of the day or whenever you plan to take a longish break (2+ hours). This will not shorten its life span, as you may have heard, and it *will* save energy.

**HOW TO DISCARD**

If your computer is still relatively new and useful when you're ready to discard it, you can donate it to a small non-profit. Clear off all your personal data first but leave the programs intact. Send along all the components (keyboard, mouse, and monitor), original disks, documentation and software licenses. Another option is to call the manufacturer to see if the company has a "take-back" program. They often charge for the service, but in time that may change. You can also search for a computer recycling company, but investigate how the company disposes of equipment before committing your machine. Unfortunately, many recyclers send the equipment to Asia where recycling is cheaper because fewer, if any, safeguards are in place.