

*Sustainability Tip #12:*

# Electronics

Rapid advances in technology come with a price: the equally rapid pace of obsolescence. The average lifespan of a computer, for example, dropped from 4.5 years in 1992 to approximately two years by 2005. As a result, "e-waste"—discarded computers, TVs, cell phones, and other electronics—comprises one to four percent of the municipal solid waste stream, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. What's worse, this equipment is often made from non-renewable resources and contains hazardous chemicals including lead, chromium, cadmium, and mercury. Here are some ways you can cut down on this e-waste:

## Reusing

- Before discarding obsolete electronics, find out whether a local repair shop, electronics training program, or even a technologically inclined friend or family member could use it for parts or practice.
- Consider donating used electronics to a nonprofit organization or school. Some organizations, for example, reprogram used cell phones for emergency use by senior citizens or victims of domestic violence. Computers that are less than five years old should be donated through an electronics refurbisher who will clean out old files and software and ensure all of the components are running properly. Computers that are more than five years old should be recycled, since software and technical support for older systems is difficult to find.

## Recycling

- **General electronics:** Many cities and towns now offer electronics recycling as part of their household hazardous waste collection program. Contact your local public works department to find out what equipment it will accept and on what days; some charge a small fee per item.
- **Computers:** If your town does not accept computers, look for a commercial recycler that can break down and distribute usable components and dispose of the rest properly (see the links below).
- **Cell phones:** Many cell phone manufacturers and service providers will take back used phones for reuse or recycling.