

**Subject: Reading, Grade: 8, Year: 2011**

Content Classifications: Informational, Critique/Evaluate, Type: ECR, Difficulty Level: Medium

---

## Reading Passage

### Tech-Trash Tragedy

by Liam O'Donnell

In our wired world, technology moves at a laser-fast pace. Every day, a new gadget arrives and promises to bring us the future, today. In the race for faster computers and more-powerful gadgets, it's easy to forget about yesterday's high-tech wonders.

Unfortunately, used computers and gadgets end up in landfills across the country. Each year, we throw away 12 million computers. And that is not good news for the environment. To make our gadgets work, many of them use materials like lead and mercury. When mercury and lead end up in a landfill, they spread poisons into the earth, water, and air for miles around. This is called e-waste—and it's becoming a big pollution problem around the world.

Big problems call for big solutions, so adults and kids from dozens of countries are working hard to clean up our e-waste. And you can help, too.

#### Turning Old Into New

The trick to stopping e-waste is to catch it before it gets into the landfill. That's why some seventh-grade students at a school in Michigan organized a computer drop-off event. They put up posters and spread the word around the town, telling people to bring out their old computers.

And the people got the message. They dropped off dozens of old computers,

monitors, and printers at the school. Craig Greshaw, the school's computer teacher who helped organize the event, believes that knowing about computers goes beyond surfing the Web. "Part of that is learning about the chemicals inside the computers and what needs to be done with them to keep them safe," he told the town newspaper during the recycling drive. With their school gym filled with old computers, the students were ready for the next step in cleaning up the high-tech trash: turning old computers into new ones.

That's where companies like RePC step in. The Seattle company takes e-waste and turns it into e-gold. "Almost all of the parts of a computer can be reused or recycled," says Mark Dabek, owner of RePC. Any computer parts that can't be reused or sold get recycled in a way that won't hurt the environment. "The circuit boards are sent to a circuit board recycler that chops them and sends them to a facility with a very, very hot furnace called 'the reactor,'" Dabek says. After the computer parts are safely crushed and burned, their raw materials can be reused to make everything from appliances to office buildings.

Sometimes you can make a new computer from the parts of an old computer. Called refurbishing, it's what



**Out with the old and in with the new! Look how it piles up!**

© Shaun Van Steyn/Stock Connection #1428004633

the tech whizzes at RePC do best. Buying a refurbished computer is a lot cheaper than buying a new one. But who wants a computer made up of old parts?

A lot of people, actually. Places like schools and community centers are often short on cash, but need computers to help them get things done. Robert Sterling, a computer teacher at a high school in California, uses computers donated from local businesses to motivate students and teach them about recycling. "If kids learn to recycle everything," says Sterling, "they will set a good example for some of the older people who are not in the habit yet of recycling every day."

Recycling old computers is big business, and there are many other companies like RePC across the country. Many big charities have computer-recycling

programs too, but be sure to call them first before you drop off any equipment.

Computers aren't the only technology that can be reused. Last year, schools in New Mexico gave old cell phones a new lease on life while also helping to raise money for charity. The students collected eleven garbage bags of old cell phones, sold them to a cell phone refurbishing company, donated the money to charity, and helped keep the environment clean—all at the same time.

### **Building a Greener Future**

Some computer makers are tackling tech trash by designing more environmentally responsible products. More new computers are made with recycled plastic and use less electricity. Many also have no lead in their circuits,

Page 3

which makes them less damaging to the environment. The same goes for those new flat monitors. Not only do they look cool, but they also use less-harmful chemicals.

start tackling the problem. Speak to your teacher about organizing a computer collection drive at your school. Next time your baseball team is raising money, try

Computers are an important part of our wired world. It's up to us to make sure that they don't pollute our planet. Talking to others about e-waste is a great way to

collecting old cell phones. By working together for a clean future, we can make e-waste a thing of the past.

From *ODYSSEY'S* September 2004 issue:  
Wired, Wired Word, © 2004, Carus Publishing Company, published by Cobblestone Publishing, 30 Grove Street, Suite C, Peterborough, NH 03458. All Rights Reserved.  
Used by permission of the publisher.

Page 4

---

Based on what you have read in this article, do you think the problem of tech trash will be difficult to solve? Explain your answer using two references to the article.

Question ID: 2011-8R13 #7 R061307