



Sustainable Practices

Cell Phone Recycling



EH&S Fact Sheet
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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY

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Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) has created this Fact Sheet to educate the USC community on cell phone recycling. Only a small percentage of used cellular phones are being recycled or reused. Because cell phones contain metals, plastics, chemicals, and other potentially hazardous substances, you should always recycle, donate, or trade in your old cell phone. It's free and easy. Don't throw it away!

Overview

You have one. Your parents have one. Your friends each have one. Owning a cell phone has become as common as having a traditional land-line in your home. Like any product, making a cell phone and its parts uses natural resources and energy, which can potentially impact the air, land, and water. You can help minimize your environmental impact by reusing or recycling your phone.

Used cellular phones contain hazardous substances and should not be disposed of with regular household waste. Understanding the life cycle of a product can help you make environmental choices about the products you use, and how you dispose of them.

- Many of the materials used in the manufacturing of circuit boards such as crude oil for plastic, and sand and limestone for fiberglass are known as "persistent toxicants" and can stay in the environment for long periods of time, even after disposal.
- Circuit boards in cellular phones contain arsenic, antimony, beryllium, cadmium, copper, lead, mercury, nickel, and zinc.
- The rechargeable batteries used with cellular phones contain cobalt, zinc, and copper.
- Cell phones that are thrown in the trash end up in landfills (buried in the ground) or incinerated.

Nearly all retailers have a "take back" system under which cell phone manufacturers and retailers accept used cell phones and accessories free of charge and either recycle, re-manufacture, or dispose of them properly.

- Cell phones can be returned to the retailer where the phone was originally purchased and also traded in to any retailer where the consumer is purchasing a new phone.
- You can also contact your manufacturer by using the information that came with your phone or via the Internet.

Please contact EH&S at 213-740-6448 for more information.

EH&S Fact Sheets are intended to facilitate team discussions in your department. Post the monthly topic on your departmental bulletin board.