

Ethical and environmental considerations – Part A

In 1993 my father bought me my first computer, an Amiga 500. I was able to word-process my homework and also play a number of different games – each program was loaded from a 1.4” floppy disk.

In 1998 my first phone was a Nokia 5146. The same way I see kids these days playing ‘the latest app’ and trying to reach a high score, reminds me of the fun I had playing this 2D “Snake” game that came preinstalled on my Nokia phone. The controls were simple, 2, 8, 4 and 6 to move the snake. There was one other game which also came preinstalled on the phone, we couldn’t add new games if we wanted to. It was a phone, at best an alarm clock and nothing like the smart phones we are used to now.

How many computers and mobile phones have you had while growing up? What about other items of technology, what do you do with them once you’ve replace them with something newer, faster or better?

What do you do with old, unwanted or broken electrical items? Do you throw them away? Recycle them? Have you ever wondered what happens to electrical items once recycled?

In this video we will be speaking about environmental and ethical considerations that need to be in place with the technology that we use.

Environmental Considerations

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) regulations have been setup by the European Union since 2007 to encourage consumers to recycle unwanted electrical items, known as ‘eWaste’.

The Environment Agency encourages all manufactures to mark all new products placed on the market with a logo.

According to the Environment Agency, the UK throws away 2 million tonnes of WEEE each year and there is a growing concern to the amount of waste we are throwing away.

So what can we do with all this eWaste?

Recycling

The EU has put together the WEEE regulations to make sure less eWaste goes to landfill and instead the valuable materials found inside everyday electrical items thrown away are instead recycled.


Did you know that there is steel found in this electrical toaster and Nickel in this old kettle. For example the Zinc found in old mobile phones could be reused in ship building and the Gold and Platinum found in a computer or consoles could be melted down to make jewellery.

Do you know where your local WEEE recycle point is? You can use this website to find out where your local centre is http://www.recyclenow.com/why_recycling_matters/electricals/index.html.

Ethical considerations of recycling eWaste

Instead of recycling we could donate working electrical items to charity or to developing countries to reuse.

However, according to Greenpeace, many old products that are being exported to developing countries might have some short term benefits, but in the long term these items are being dumped and are contributing to the countries waste management problems.



Globally we have a real problem that is emerging. For example, it costs \$30 for a computer to be recycled in the United States and \$2 to recycle the same computer in China. Therefore western companies prefer to ship these items to be disposed to China, India and Pakistan.

It is legal for countries to export items to developing countries for reuse or refurbishment, but according to Interpol and the Guardian, many items sent are incorrectly classified to avoid recycling costs and are actually waste items which are lost on the black market to avoid the legitimate costs of recycling.