

## E-waste

A recent investigation claims that some computers are being disposed of in ways which are damaging to both health and the environment. What *does* happen to old computers?

1 Do you know the following verbs?

dump	discard	damage
recycle	dispose	dismantle

2 Scan the article and find as many of these verbs, or derivatives of them, as you can in just two minutes.

### Whatever happens to old computers?

Investigations by BBC programme-makers reveal that computer waste is still being dumped in developing nations. This contravenes the Basel Convention, which regulates the shipment and disposal of hazardous materials. E-waste is a growing problem with much of it being sent to India and China.

About 130 million computers will be manufactured and sold this year, and turnover is fast. A number of western countries have made it illegal to dump old computers in landfill sites. They have to be recycled, a process which costs tens of dollars per computer. But some companies choose a cheaper option – they export them to developing countries where regulations on processing are either non-existent or ignored. Many of these discarded machines end up being dismantled in ways that are damaging to the environment and to the health of the workers who take them apart. These workers, who often have no

protective clothing, are exposed to dangerous materials such as lead, mercury, arsenic and cadmium which can result in serious illness and disability.

Next year, a new European Union directive called WEEE – Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment – comes into force which should make e-waste dumping from Europe a thing of the past. Manufacturers will have to take back computers that have reached the end of their useful lives and make sure they are properly recycled. Unfortunately, negotiations on setting up a similar scheme in the United States, which environmental groups regard as the principal source of e-waste, have broken down.

However, most industrialised nations agree that as long as IT products are seen as disposable – it's cheaper to buy a completely new system than it is to upgrade – the only way to control their disposal is through legislation.

3 Read the whole article. What happens to old computers?

4 Find words or expressions in the article which mean:

- |     |  |               |
|-----|--|---------------|
| (a) | to do something that is not allowed by a rule, law, or agreement | (paragraph 1) |
| (b) | large holes in the ground where rubbish from industry is buried  | (paragraph 2) |
| (c) | official controls on an activity, process, or industry           | (paragraph 2) |
| (d) | an official order  | (paragraph 3) |
| (e) | to make a computer or machine more powerful or effective         | (paragraph 4) |

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5 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- What does your company do with computers it no longer needs?
- Should companies be responsible for recycling their own e-waste?
- How should electronic waste be disposed of?