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Taking the Byte Out of Waste II

Finding recycling options for Computers and Electronics has remained the number one concern for visitors to Planet Ark's RecyclingNearYou (RNY) website for the second year in a row. Indeed, four of the top five enquiries relate to electronic waste.

There were 1,830,829 visits to the site in the year from 1st May 2009 to 30th April 2010. This represents a 36% increase over the same period in the year before.

Electronic Waste Enquiries

The RecyclingNearYou site has 32 specific product categories that can be searched for find local recycling options - where they exist.

The relative importance of e-waste is demonstrated by the fact that various types of e-waste made up 4 of the top 5 product enquiries. They are;

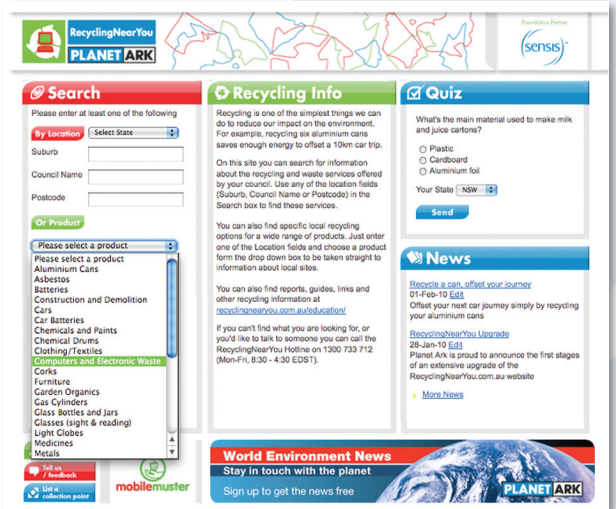
- 220,011 enquiries for Computers and Electronics representing an increase of 46% on the same period in the year before,
- 112,725 Battery enquiries (single use and rechargeable) - an increase of 7%,

- 105,655 Mobile Phone enquiries - an increase of 14%,
- 96,326 Printer Cartridge enquiries - an increase of 19%.

Not only was the Computers and Electronics category the number one enquiry for the second year in a row but it grew by a remarkable 46% over the same period in the year before. Clearly showing Australians are increasingly aware of, and concerned, about finding sustainable options for disposing of their electronic waste.

Computers and Electronics

It is an unfortunate reality that there is not a standardised national program addressing the collection and recycling of Computers and Electronics. In terms of computer recycling RNY provides information on the confusing array of potential options including manufacturer take-back and not-for-profit and

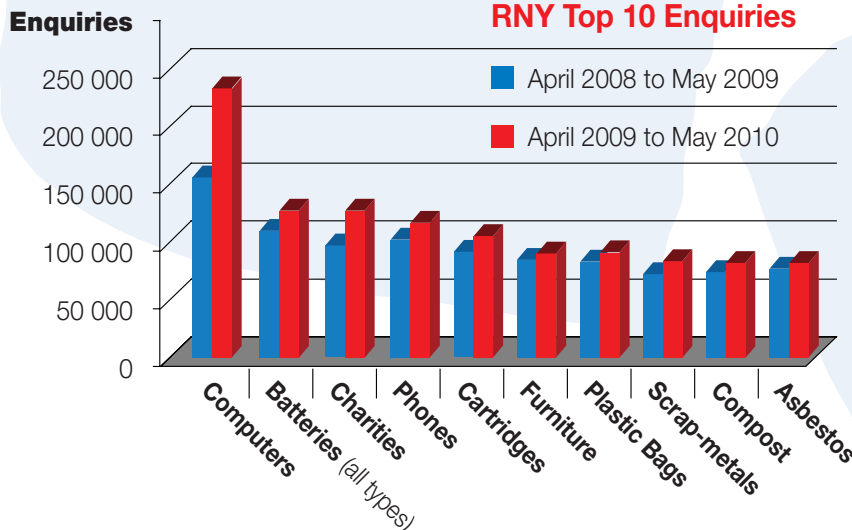


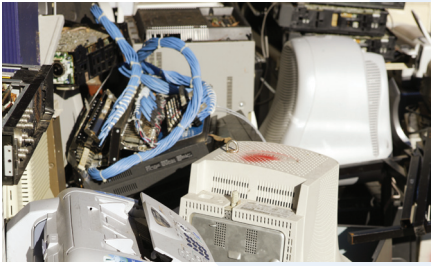
programs, commercial collections, and increasingly, council run programs. Finding an appropriate recycling can be difficult and in many areas, particularly rural locations, there are no real options.

It is hoped that by passing the Environment Protection and Heritage Council's proposed National Product Stewardship Framework legislation the Australian Parliament will rectify this situation therefore, making it easier for Australians to find appropriate recycling options.

Batteries

Similarly, there is no national collection and recycling program for small consumer (dry cell) batteries. Increasingly RNY is able to direct enquiries to small scale or localised collections around the country. Many councils collect batteries for recycling using commercial collection boxes. This provides local options for residents but comes at considerable cost to the councils. Other localised programs include the trial BatteryBack program run in partnership with Sustainability Victoria and the (Perth) Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council program that has seen the establishment of collection points throughout their six councils.





Other types of batteries are accounted for in a variety of programs. Mobile phone batteries, for example, are recycled through MobileMuster. While car batteries are collected through a number of operators including the extensive Century Yuasa network. (Century Yuasa is the RNY Car Battery Category Sponsor.)

The Australian Battery Recycling Initiative (ABRI) has been formed by a group of battery manufacturers, recyclers, government bodies and environment groups to promote the collection, recycling and safe disposal of the full range of batteries. For more information visit BatteryRecycling.org.au.

Mobiles and Cartridges

The third and fourth e-waste categories, mobile phones and printer cartridges, present a different picture. Both products have voluntary extended producer responsibility programs underpinning their collection and recycling. The MobileMuster and 'Cartridges 4 Planet Ark' programs have extensive collection networks around Australia. A quick search of the site reveals literally thousands of drop-off locations.

MobileMuster is the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association program and is funded by a fee on all participating manufacturers' mobiles imported into Australia. The 'Cartridges 4 Planet Ark' program is a partnership with recycling partner Close the Loop, and five participating Manufacturers – Brother, Canon, Epson, Konica Minolta and Lexmark. The manufacturers cover the cost of collecting, transporting, and recycling their cartridges and for promoting

the program. They are taking responsibility for the cartridges they produce.

Also In the Top Five

With 112,000 enquiries 'Charities' come in the number three spot. This is an increase of 32% on the previous year and shows a public that is keen to find alternative reuse options for their unwanted items.

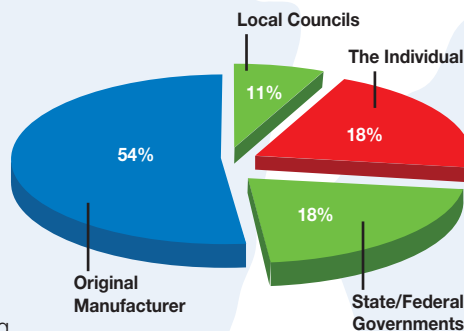
Paying For E-Waste

Throughout October 2009 Planet Ark ran a poll on the front page of RecyclingNearYou asking visitors "Who do you think should pay for recycling electronic waste (eg computers/TV etc)?" with a choice of the: The Original Manufacturer; Local Councils; State/ Federal Governments, or; The Individual Disposing Of It.

Throughout the month just over 1,500 visitors responded to the poll.

The poll results indicate that 11% of respondents believe Local Councils should pay for electronic waste recycling, 18% believe State/Federal Governments should pay and further 18% believe it is the responsibility of the individual disposing of the item. Finally, 54% believe that the original manufacturers should be responsible for covering the costs of recycling.

Who Should Pay?



Although there are examples of manufacturer and state government initiated programs it seems that local councils are shouldering a considerable burden for recycling e-waste. In an informal ring-around of 76, mostly Victorian, councils between January and April 2010, 61 (or 80%) reported that they provide some form of e-waste collection and recycling program. Some cover the costs through their own budgets while others seek external funding. The adoption of a national product stewardship program will help bring recycling programs in line with public expectations.

About RNY

Planet Ark established the RecyclingNearYou.com.au website and Hotline in partnership with Sensis and the Australian Government, to provide Australians with a one-stop-shop for recycling information. The site is currently being upgraded to provide even greater levels of functionality, including Where Is mapping and more recycling information.

Since the launch in November 2006 there have been more than 4.9 million site visits and 17,600 phone and e-mail enquiries.

The services provide a comprehensive database of recycling information including:

- The kerbside and other council operated services for every Australian council, including green waste, hazardous and hard waste and bin replacement information, and
- Local options for products including: Car Parts and Tyres; C&D; Corks; Gas Cylinders; Glasses; Medicines; Paper; Cooking and Motor Oil; Plastic Bags; Polystyrene and Scrap Metal.

Further Information

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Acknowledgements

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