

Submission to the 11-15-04 Ann Arbor News "Your World" column:

## **"Wise" wireless disposal**

Are you thinking of buying a wireless phone this holiday season and retiring an old one? If so, please recycle it! Although only a small part of the total waste stream, wireless phones contain a large number of hazardous substances. These toxins can pollute the air when burned in incinerators, and leach into soil and drinking water when buried in landfills. Possible by-products such as antimony, arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, copper, lead, nickel, and zinc can linger in the environment for long periods without breaking down.

So far, there are no regulations requiring that cell phones or other hazardous household electronic devices be recycled. The California legislature has passed a bill that will at least encourage cell phone recycling, by requiring sellers to maintain collection bins and inform their customers of recycling options.

Over a billion of these phones are in use worldwide. With an average life span of only 18 months—driven by the demand for new features—the sheer numbers of them are presenting a growing disposal problem. Over 100 million wireless phones will be retired in the U.S. next year. Although over half are still useable, only about 5-10% of them will be recycled or refurbished.

Buying refurbished phones lessens the demand for raw materials. For instance, copper and nickel (used in cell phones) will be mined at a controversial project in the Upper Peninsula, which opponents fear will leach dangerous heavy metals and sulfuric acid.

Unfortunately, there is a stigma against refurbished phones in the U.S.. But developing countries throughout the world welcome the lower prices that these products offer. ReCellular Inc. of Dexter is the world's largest refurbisher and recycler of used cell phones.

Since their founding in 1991, they have kept over 10 million cell phones out of landfills, and currently take in 10,000 phones a day. The phones they receive that are unusable are disassembled and recycled.

Many stores that sell wireless phones also collect used phones (of any brand) for recycling. The collected phones are then sold to companies like ReCellular, and the stores' profits from these collections are donated to charities. For instance, Verizon Wireless has given almost \$5 million to domestic violence programs.

In addition to collection bins in stores, Washtenaw County will have a multi-county electronic waste collection in the spring of 2005. They can also be taken to the Washtenaw County Drop-Off Station at 2950 E. Ellsworth in Ann Arbor, any day except Sundays.

Or recycle wireless phones without even leaving your home. Go to [www.motorola.com](http://www.motorola.com), and type “recycle” in the search field, to download and print a postage-free mailing label. Apply the label to the package, and simply drop it in your mailbox.

So get your old phones out of the closet and recycle them—it’s easy!

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