



Reducing Waste

From Office Equipment and Supplies

The range and sophistication of the equipment used in most offices today has grown enormously in recent times. Increasingly we depend on the services and convenience provided by such office essentials as computers, photocopiers, printers, faxes and other equipment and as their numbers have multiplied, so too has the need to dispose of them once their useful lives are over.

Obsolete equipment and used consumables like toner cartridges have become a major part of the waste stream.

However, the good news is that more and more of this equipment can be reconditioned, or refilled in the case of cartridges, giving them a new lease of life and saving resources.

Changing the way we use and dispose of our office equipment and supplies is a great way to start making a positive impact on the environment. You'll be surprised how easy it can be with a bit of effort and coordination in your office.

Setting some targets for reducing office waste will give you something to work towards and a reason to celebrate when you get there!

How much waste from office equipment are we making?

Our reliance on office equipment is shown by the number of print toner cartridges used in Australia each year ... and the number that end up in landfill rather than being reused. We throw away around 18 million used cartridges each year. That's 5,000 tonnes of waste.

What's wrong with all this waste?

The truth is, often there's still life in the equipment and components that are being thrown away.

In the past we thought of waste materials, like used office equipment, as worthless and fit only for disposal, but now we are taking a second look at the waste we

have been throwing away. For instance, many types of office equipment and toner cartridges can be recycled or reused, some several times.

Recycling or reusing these materials means we are getting the most from valuable resources, reducing the cost of waste disposal, and helping to protect the environment.

Essentially, we are avoiding the creation of waste by prolonging the life of equipment and materials already in use. Purchasing refurbished equipment and recycled cartridges also encourages sustainable markets for these products.

What can we do?

To move away from disposal and towards getting the most from our resources means we need to look at new ways of buying, using and disposing of the things we need, including office equipment.

Try some of the suggestions below to get the best out of your office equipment and reduce the need for their disposal.

Buying office equipment

A lot of the new office equipment available today has the potential to be used again, either in a refurbished or reconditioned form or for spare parts.

Many machines are able to use recycled paper, cartridges and rollers, and some of the toner and ink cartridges can also be refilled. Check recycled consumables can be used in any equipment you are planning to buy, or currently own, and that their use will not affect the warranty or service agreement for this equipment.

- Research the types of equipment and consumables your office is using. Are they able to be recycled at the end of their current life? Perhaps they are already refurbished models or components?

Packaging around office equipment can also be a major source of waste, especially plastic, polystyrene and cardboard. Ask your equipment supplier to take back used packaging for reuse or recycling.

Cartridges 4 Planet Ark

Planet Ark have established a printer cartridge recycling system. You can drop off your used cartridges in specially marked boxes at participating Australia Post, Dick Smith and Powerhouse, Office Works, Harvey Norman, Tandy outlets.

Visit www.RecycleNearYou.com.au to find your nearest collection outlet.

- Find out what types of suitable recyclable or remade machines are available.
- Ask suppliers what recycled cartridges they have and whether they void any warranties or service agreements for equipment using them.
- Change your equipment supply contract to require supply of remade machines or toner cartridges where possible.
- Find out if suppliers or other companies take back used machines or cartridges.
- Investigate buying a combination machine (printer, copier, fax and scanner), which will reduce the number of individual machines in the office. Make sure this doesn't increase paper use because of greater printing capacity.
- Buy equipment suited to your needs, rather than large and complex machines with unnecessary functions.
- Rent equipment you only use occasionally.
- Order cartridges with minimal packaging if possible.
- Set targets to check your progress towards a more environmentally friendly office.

For more ideas on how you can help your environment, visit the 'It's a living thing' website at www.livingthing.net.au

- Look after your office equipment by sticking to maintenance schedules.
- Set printers and photocopiers to double-sided printing where this function is available.
- Don't print e-mails or other documents unless absolutely necessary.

- Save your fax by using e-mail instead.
- Configure your fax so it doesn't print unnecessary activity reports.
- Check the availability of long-life cartridges and whether they can be used in your office machines.
- Reduce printing of graphics, pictures or images downloaded from the internet as the amount of toner they use significantly reduces toner life.
- Consider getting large print runs photocopied or printed professionally to avoid excessive wear and tear on machines.

Reusing/recycling office equipment

A lot of equipment, cartridges or other valuable materials normally sent to landfill can be reused or recycled. Check whether this is something you can do with your used machines and cartridges.

If we all make an effort to get the best out of our office equipment and delay turning it into waste, we'll be acting to care for our environment both now and for future generations. We'll be using resources more wisely and probably saving money too.

- Ask your supplier what happens to your obsolete machines at the end of their useful life. Can they be remade into new machines? Or can recyclable components, such as plastic panels, be stripped off and made into other products?
- Separate toner cartridges from other office waste and send them back to the supplier or manufacturer.
- Many suppliers, manufacturers and charities run cartridge return programs. Ask if your supplier offers this service and whether they supply boxes to put used cartridges in or envelopes to mail them back.
- Donate obsolete but functioning machines to charities or sell them at auction.