

# E-Waste Continues to Pile up Around the Globe



**This year alone, 5.3 billion mobile phones will disappear into drawers, closets, garages and landfills.**

**A** catch-all term used to describe electronic products that are unwanted, no longer operational or closing in on the end of their useful lives, e-waste has become a hot topic in recent years. As more consumers and businesses invest in the latest and greatest devices and gadgets, the discarded computers, laptops, mobile phones and TVs will often make their way into the world's landfills.

The problem has worsened over the last two years, and the COVID-19 pandemic has been a key driver. According to Deloitte, the number of smart devices in the average U.S. home has more than doubled over the past two years to 25—up from just 11 in 2019. During the pandemic, about 38% of Americans added more internet-connected devices to their homes, including smartphones, laptops, smart TVs, tablets and gaming consoles.

At some point in the future, nearly all of these devices will fall out of favor, break, become obsolete and/or be replaced by newer, better and faster products. In 2022 alone, the [WEEE Forum](#) (waste electrical and electronic equipment) says 5.3 billion mobile phones—of the 16 billion that people currently possess worldwide—will become waste.

If they were stacked flat atop one another at an average depth of 9 millimeters, WEEE Forum says that many phones would reach a vertical height of about 31,000 miles. The stack would be 120 times higher than the International Space Station and reach one-eighth of the way to the moon.

“And, despite their valuable gold, copper, silver, palladium and other recyclable components,” says the international association of 46 e-waste producer responsibility organizations, “experts expect a majority will disappear into drawers, closets, cupboards or garages, or be tossed into waste bins bound for landfills or incineration.”

## Hoarding Electronics

Consumers aren't apt to recycle or repair electronics. Instead, they stuff the unwanted devices into desk drawers, pack them in boxes or store them in garages. According to WEEE Forum, this is because:

1. They might use it again in the future (46% of consumers surveyed said this)
2. They plan on selling it or giving it away (15%)
3. The product has sentimental value (13%)
4. The product may have value in the future (9%)
5. They just don't know how to dispose of it (7%)

“In 2022 alone, small EEE items such as cell phones, electric toothbrushes, toasters and cameras produced worldwide will weigh an estimated total of 24.5 million tons – four times the weight of the Great Pyramid of Giza,” said WEEE Forum's Magdalena Charytanowicz, in a [press release](#). “And these small items make up a significant proportion of the 8% of all e-waste thrown into trash bins and eventually landfilled or incinerated.”

## Finding Solutions

The e-waste problem isn't going to go away on its own. As technology continues to advance and as companies develop newer, faster and better products, consumers and businesses will continue to invest in them. Inevitably, the discarded electronics will wind up on a shelf, in a drawer or in a landfill.

Some large electronics makers are taking steps to mitigate the problem and encourage their customers to return their unused electronics. Apple, for example, offers customers who are upgrading their products cash in exchange for the iPads, watches, phones and other products that they no longer need. So rather than tossing that old Apple watch or iPad Pro in the hall closet, consumers can get cash for the goods. The traded-in products may be refurbished and sold worldwide or used as part of the manufacturer's repair and replace programs.

“While tech manufacturers have come under fire for tactics aimed at making you upgrade, policymakers have recently enacted changes to push companies to make it easier for customers to repair consumer electronics and support the rise of the Right-to-Repair movement,” [CNN](#) reports. “Earlier this year, Apple and Samsung launched their self-service repair stores, offering parts for users seeking do-it-yourself fixes for their smartphones. Google similarly announced it would offer genuine Pixel parts for DIY-ers at an online store this year.”