

LONG LIFE

PRODUCTS THAT LAST

The useful lifetime of many consumer products – i.e. the amount of time between buying and getting rid of them – is getting ever shorter [1]. When a consumer has decided to discard a product, a large part of the resources that make up that product get buried in the ground or burnt, even though most of the components are still usable. Recycling is one solution to recover a product's resources.

But why break something up when only one of the parts is defective?

If something is broken, it can be fixed rather than thrown away. Other parts can be refurbished or even upgraded. Some products can be remanufactured to a state that is as good as new or even better. As long as the product is still operational, it can also be re-used by others. [2]

WHAT IS THE SITUATION?

Today, electrical and electronic waste alone is growing at 3 to 5% per year across the EU. It is expected to hit 12 million tonnes yearly before 2020 according to the European Commission [3]. This is creating huge pressure on our ecosystems and is depleting available natural resources.

'THERE IS 3-5% MORE ELECTRICAL/ELECTRONIC WASTE EVERY YEAR IN THE EU'

If products were to last longer and be repaired more easily, households would have to spend less of their income on replacing everyday consumer goods that fail early. The job creation potential in repair activities is enormous. These are labour-intensive services which require both manpower and skills and which

are less likely to be sent outside of the EU. One difficulty repair services face today is the absence of repair manuals and spare parts associated with the product. But there are regulations for the automotive sector which demand that manufacturers make repair information and spare parts available for all service providers. A solution could be to extend these regulations to household goods covered by the existing EU Ecodesign Directive. [4]

Remanufacturing a product goes one step further than repair. By disassembling a product and returning it to an 'as-good-as-new' state, it can be sold again on the market as a new product, thereby extending the lifetime of most of its parts. Re-manufacturing is currently working in Business-to-Business markets, but it can, and should be, scaled up to consumer products. [5]

FACTS AND FIGURES

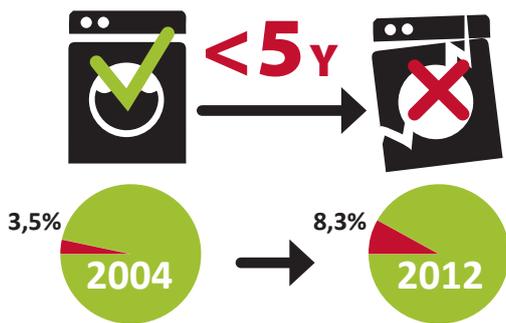
A BETWEEN 20% AND 35% OF THE MATERIAL CONTENT OF A PHONE IS LOST WHEN THE PHONE IS SHREDDED AND MELTED DOWN FOR RECYCLING [6]



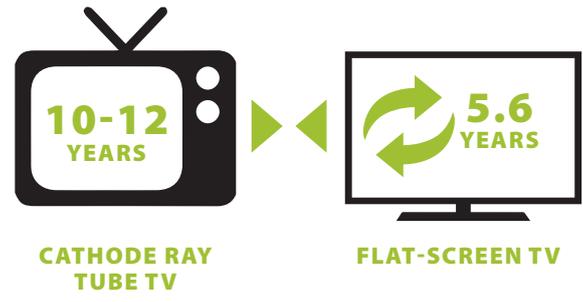
B YOUR SMARTPHONE CONSUMES ENOUGH ENERGY DURING MANUFACTURING TO POWER



C THE PROPORTION OF LARGE HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES SUCH AS WASHING MACHINES, FRIDGES OR DISHWASHERS WHICH HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITHIN LESS THAN 5 YEARS DUE TO A DEFECT ROSE FROM 3.5 % TO 8.3 % BETWEEN 2004 AND 2012 [7].



D IN 2012, THE AVERAGE TV WAS REPLACED EVERY 5.6 YEARS. BY CONTRAST, THE AVERAGE DURATION OF CATHODE RAY TUBE TV'S FROM 2005 TO 2012 WAS BETWEEN 10 AND 12 YEARS [7].



CASE STUDIES

Furniture Re-use Network
 The Furniture Re-use Network (FRN) in the UK has a take back scheme in partnership with corporate retailers including IKEA, John Lewis, DHLE and Dixons. More than 78,000 quality, reusable items, supplied by the corporate retailers, went to people living in poverty through the take-back scheme.

- 2,818 sofas provided by IKEA in the past year helped save households £845,400
- 254 tonnes of furniture collected from the John Lewis FRN take-back scheme in 2014 prevented over 125 tonnes of CO₂ from being emitted into the atmosphere [8]



Re-manufacturing set-top boxes
 Millions of Europeans use set-top boxes. These items provide access to cable or satellite TV and the internet. After being used, many of them get tested, repaired or even re-manufactured to then re-enter the market as new products. The social and environmental benefits of this process are wide-ranging: apart from creating skilled jobs, the re-manufacturing process causes 15 times less greenhouse gas emissions than the creation of a new product using virgin resources. Re-manufacturing of the same set-top box can also take place 7 times. [9]



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen the EU requirements for product design to make them last longer and to ensure that it is easier to dis- and re-assemble them
- Ensure a minimum product lifetime through extending the legal guarantee beyond two years with the burden of proof on manufacturers where appropriate
- Develop an information or rating scheme that will guide consumers towards longer-lasting and repairable goods. Mandatory display of the warranty period on a related labelling scheme may stimulate further competition and market differentiation in this area
- Define a legal obligation to issue product passports and link them to an EU database to facilitate access to relevant information for different people along the value chain, as well as procurement departments to consumers
- Make repair manuals available in a standardised format and ensure spare parts are also available. Require a mandatory warning on the product if they are not provided by the manufacturer. Make it easier for independent service providers to access product specifications and diagnostic tools from the manufacturer
- Incentivise return rates for used components and products;
- Develop EU-wide standards or even a quality label for remanufactured products to build trust and stimulate the demand side
- Set public procurement criteria for longer lasting, more repairable products and make them the default choice for procurement departments

FOR MORE INFORMATION

WRAP – www.wrap.org.uk/node/18473
 RREUSE – www.rreuse.org/making-repair-cheaper-and-easier-through-eu-policy/
 IFIXIT – <http://ifixit.org/right>
 Zero Waste Scotland – www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/RemanufacturingReport



With the support of the LIFE Programme of the European Union

This communication reflects the authors' views and does not commit the donors.