**E-waste**

Should we worry about e-waste? I mean most things with an ‘e-’ (or an ‘i-’) in the beginning of their name are nifty and useful and nice. E-waste sounds like something virtual, something untouchable. Something that only exists in the world of bits and bytes. Kinda like what happens when you write an assignment that the teacher doesn’t read or when you lose a ton of mp3’s when your iPod falls into the pool. What a waste of e-stuff!

Problem is, its not really like that. E-waste is nasty stuff. Really, really nasty. Killer nasty.

**How much of it is there?**

E-waste is anything electronic or related to electronics that is chucked out. Think old computer, big clunky old CRT computer monitors, broken hard drives, dead (or unwanted) cellphones, TVs, gameboys, even batteries.

How old are you? In your lifetime how many phones and gadgets have you had? How many have your parents or other family members had? What happens to the devices that are not wanted or not used anymore? Sure, they may end up in a drawer or a box for a while, but eventually they get chucked out, right? In the trash, just like anything else… Come to think of it, how many batteries have you chucked in the trash?

**What is the danger?**

How can e-waste be killer nasty? It’s all about what gets used to make the parts in the device. Lead is used in soldering. Ever heard of lead poisoning? It’s not a nice way to die. Mercury is used in the manufacturing of the actual circuit (PCB) boards. Arsenic is used in making glass. The list goes on.

Official speak says that “many of the materials that go into making electronic devices are toxic or carcinogenic or both”. Toxic = poisonous. Carcinogenic = Cancer causing.

OK, so the quantities in individual devices are small. And the design, the case, the shell – all of that part of the device protects us from the harmful materials inside it. But take that same device and toss it on a trash heap where it can be crushed and damaged and exposed to the elements. Toss in a whole lot more devices like it (hundreds, thousands, millions…). Leave them for a few years for mother nature to do her work. Soon the poisons and cancer causing chemicals will no longer be safe inside the cases. They will be seeping and leaking and oozing out where they can damage living things that come into contact with them. Or even worse, seep into the water table and poison the local water sources.

**Recycling is the responsible solution**

Recycling e-waste makes sure that the poisons are removed properly before the materials get put into dump sites that later become parks or housing estates or even schools. Recycling also gets back a lot of the valuable materials (copper, gold, etc.) that are also inside the tech that we so happily throw away. FYI – in many countries it is illegal to throw e-waste into normal trash that will end up in a landfill – so recycling is not only responsible and useful, it can also save you from some pretty serious legal trouble too!

**Remember! E-waste might not kill you now, but just be patient. It will get to you (or your children, or your grand children or maybe your great grand children) in the end!**