

Mobile Phones

Mobile Phones have fast become one of life's most important communication tools. With new technological advances encouraging regular upgrades, mobile phones are rapidly becoming a major waste problem. They contain toxic materials which will harm the environment.

The Problem

There are an estimated 31 million mobile phones in Australia.¹ With the average person replacing their mobile phones every 18 months², there are millions of old mobile phones that are left unused or are discarded to landfill.



Why is it a problem?

Many components of mobile phones are considered toxic and potentially harm the environment and human health if not handled properly. Some of the highly toxic elements contained in a single mobile phone can include²:

- Cadmium
- Lead
- Mercury

These are poisonous substances which can leach from decomposing waste in landfills, seep into groundwater, contaminate the soil and enter the food chain.

There is a risk people may develop health problems when exposed to these toxins. They include respiratory ailments, reproductive, developmental and nervous system problems. It is essential that these millions of unwanted phones do not end up in landfill.

It is also important to realise that mobile phones are just one of the electronic items creating a significant e-waste problem in Australia and around the World.

Mobile phones and climate change

The energy and raw materials used to produce new mobile phones every year contributes significantly to CO2 emissions and global warming. It is estimated that up to 90% of these greenhouse gases can be saved by recovering materials from mobile phones than using virgin resources.⁴

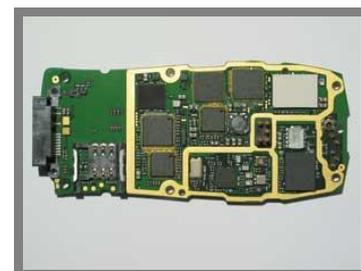
Can mobile phones be recycled?

There are many parts of a mobile phone that can be recovered and used to make new products⁴. They include:

- **Batteries** contain nickel to produce stainless steel, cobalt, and cadmium to make new batteries.
- **Circuit boards** contain small amounts of gold and silver that can be used in jewellery and other products.
- **Handset housings and casings** are made of plastics that can be shredded and used to make products such as fence posts and pallets.
- **Accessories** include plastics and metals can be shredded, sorted and then used to make new plastic or metal products.

Did you know?

- About 70% of people in Australia have at least one old mobile phone at home. 37% have at least 2 or more.⁴
- There are an estimated 23.5 million unused handsets in Australia.⁴
- Mobile phones contain a cocktail of highly toxic elements such as cadmium, arsenic and lead.²
- 94% of the materials within a mobile phone can be recycled.⁴
- Only 9.1% of mobile phones are currently being recycled.⁴
- 300 grams of gold can be recovered from approximately 1 tonne of recycled mobile phones. The amount of gold extracted saves mining 110 tonnes of gold ore.³





Clean Up Mobile Phones

The Solution



Clean Up Mobile Phones is a campaign run by Clean Up Australia in partnership with Aussie Recycling Program, to make it easy for the community to return their unwanted mobile phones for an environmental benefit.

How do I get involved?

Anyone can get involved in Clean Up Mobile Phones – whether you are an individual, community, business, school, university, government or environment group – Clean Up makes it easy to return your unwanted phones. You can return your old mobile phones for recycling through two different methods:

1. Individual collection

Individuals can return old mobile phones simply by requesting a Clean Up Mobile Phones Recycling Satchel. You can put your mobile phone and battery in the satchel following the guidelines and put it in an Australia Post Box for return to our recycling partner: Aussie Recycling Program.

You can request up to 10 satchels for free by registering at [Clean Up Mobile Phones](#).

2. Organising a large collection

Organising a larger collection is a great way to raise awareness of e-waste and environmental issues among staff or members of an organisation. It is also a simple and practical way for employees to contribute in a positive way to the environment.

For more information about how this works go the [Clean Up Mobile Phones](#) section of our website.

What happens with the phones?

Once returned to our recycling partner, Aussie Recycling Program, the phones which are not too old or damaged are cleaned and repaired. They are then sent overseas for resale in developing countries. This helps to provide affordable access to telecommunications.

This campaign also provides valuable funding to Clean Up Australia. For each phone returned we receive a small donation. This money goes directly toward funding Clean Up Australia's campaigns to clean up, fix up and conserve the environment.



References

- 1) Australia Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) [Annual Report 2013-2014](#)
- 2) Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) [Website](#)
- 3) Cell Phone Recycling [Website](#)
- 4) Mobile Buster [Website](#)