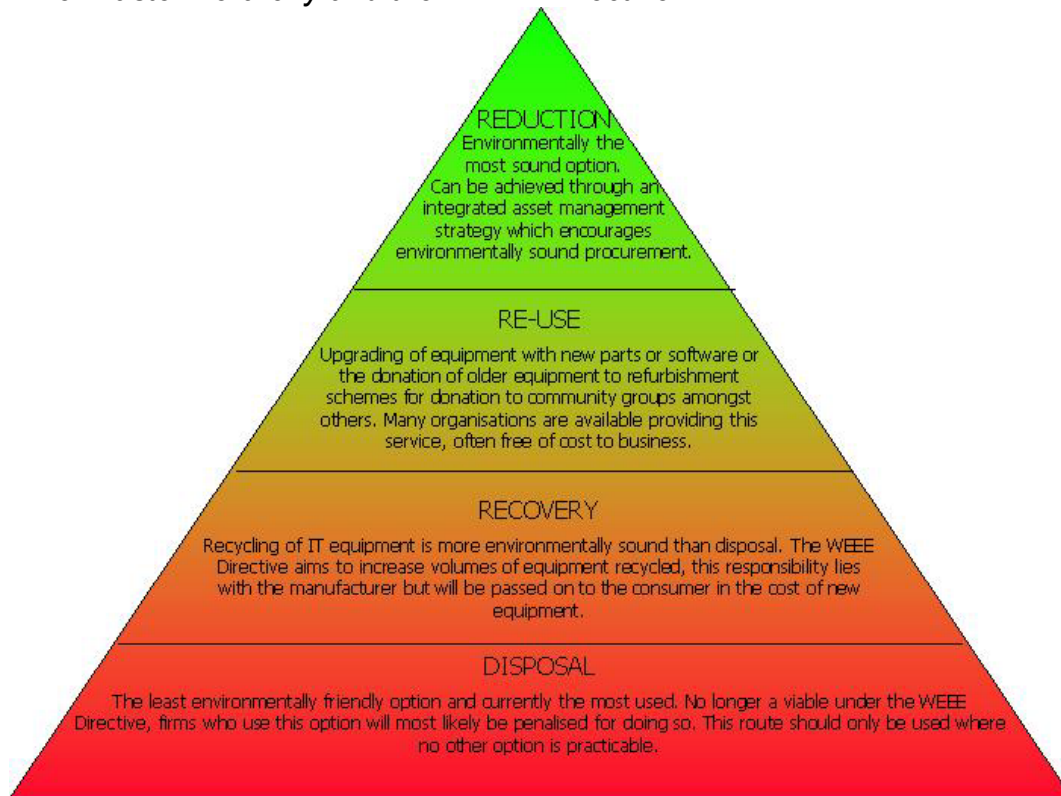


## The WEEE Directive

The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive came into effect across Europe after being passed by the European Commission on 27 January 2003. All European Union member states, including the UK, are currently engaged in the process of transposing this into national law, a target that must be achieved by August 2004. The Directive sets collection, recovery and recycling rates for all types of electronic waste. Additional Directives, including the Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) Directive, are also being introduced to underpin the WEEE Directive. To support this Directive, member states are required to ensure that they have in place adequate collection, treatment and financing systems for WEEE before September 2005, with the first collection targets to be attained by December 2006. The key aims of the WEEE Directive are to reduce the volumes of toxic waste from WEEE going to landfill by encouraging a movement up the waste hierarchy (*Figure 1*) from poor environmental options such as disposal, to increased recycling and reuse of products wherever possible. Ultimately, the Directive should, by placing the responsibility for safe disposal on them, encourage manufacturers to produce equipment that is designed in a more environmentally sound way.

Figure 1 - The Waste Hierarchy and the WEEE Directive



Based on the polluter pays principle, the WEEE Directive will ensure that the costs of disposing of all electronic equipment, including computer equipment<sup>1</sup>, are borne directly by the producer, in this case, the manufacturer of the equipment. However, the manufacturer is not obliged to provide this service free of charge to business users and domestic users should not be charged for this service under the Directive. The Industry Council for Electronic Equipment Recycling (ICER) has estimated that around twenty-two million units of computer equipment, accounting for approximately three hundred and fifty seven tonnes of waste, was disposed of in the UK in 1998, most of this waste going to landfill. With volumes of WEEE rising at between three and five percent per annum, computer waste accounts for around thirty-nine percent of WEEE arisings. Current estimates of computer recycling rates are estimated at between twenty-four and twenty-six percent. Under the WEEE Directive, the UK will have to recover eighty-one percent of this waste by weight and reuse sixty-five percent by weight. This target must be reached by 31 December 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> Computer equipment can be considered to be personal computers, monitors, keyboards, mice, printers, fax machines, network servers and all cables and connectors and their constituent parts.