

What Can Businesses Do?

At present it is a difficult task to assess exactly how much of the burden the government will place on businesses with regard to ensuring that their old computer equipment is disposed of in accordance to the WEEE Directive. One thing is however certain, - the Directive will be enforced strongly whether the onus falls mainly on the waste owner (i.e. the person wishing to dispose of the waste) or the original manufacturer, but in all probability both will share the responsibility, and all businesses will be affected. As has been stated, those companies that plan ahead and ensure that they put in place systems to handle computer equipment in a more environmentally sustainable and cost-effective way will be those that will be least affected by the Directive. There will be three key effects on businesses following the formal adoption of the Directive:

1. Businesses will pay more for new computer equipment due to the responsibilities placed on manufacturers.
2. Businesses without a strong asset management policy will suffer through high disposal costs.
3. Businesses caught scrapping computer equipment will likely incur severe financial penalties.

There is little a business can do about point one above since manufacturers will raise prices and businesses will be forced to pay in order to procure new equipment. However, points two and three can be avoided through the development of an IT asset management strategy. There are three main stages to the development of a strategy that could save businesses money and help them to comply with the WEEE Directive:

1. Appoint a person within the organisation who will be responsible for ensuring that a computer equipment recycling policy is developed and implemented. This should be a person with sufficient authority to ensure that the policy will be implemented and enforced, usually a representative of senior management. It is vital that the strategy has a champion, as without it, it could easily falter.
2. Develop an ongoing internal communications strategy with regards to computer equipment recycling. The IT strategy will never succeed if people do not know about it and what it involves. It is also important for its success that the workforce feels some ownership of the strategy.
3. Devise a computer equipment management policy that takes into account:
 - a. Sourcing and procurement. This should take into consideration the future costs of equipment including penalties likely to be imposed on the company under the WEEE Directive at the point of disposal. Issues to include are:
 - i. Has the manufacturer designed the equipment to ensure upgradability?
 - ii. Has consideration been given to the recyclability of materials in the design of equipment?
 - iii. What initiatives are being undertaken by the manufacturer to design more environmentally friendly equipment in the future?
 - iv. What options do you have that will reduce the possible financial impact on your business at the point of disposal, such as:
 1. Does the company you are purchasing from have a take-back scheme? (Details of current take-back schemes are included in Appendix 2).

2. Is a leasing option available?

b. Equipment disposal.

- i. Decide at what stage should equipment be disposed of and when upgrades should take place?
- ii. Determine how equipment should be disposed of? (i.e. disposal to landfill, resale, refurbishment)
- iii. Decide with whom does the responsibility for ensuring equipment is disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner lie?
- iv. Do you have a preferred contractor? What criteria must they meet?
- v. Put in place an auditing procedure to check that equipment is being handled appropriately.

Whilst the above list is not exclusive, it does highlight some of the key issues for consideration. It should be remembered that in a medium to large sized organisation, development, communication, implementation and achievement of total compliance with a new strategy can take up to two to three years, and therefore companies must start now to be ready for the Directive coming into force in August 2005.