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Wasteland

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Answer the questions with a classmate.

1. *What is a gadget?*
2. *If you could have only one of the gadgets shown on this page, which one would you choose? Why?*
3. *Do you think they are really useful? What for?*
4. *What do you do with old gadgets that you don't use anymore?*



Meet the Topic

1 Discuss these sentences with a classmate. Do you think they are true?

1. "A computer's life is now under two years."
2. "Companies have deliberately made it impossible to repair their goods."
3. "Electronic equipment is indispensable in home and workplace."
4. "Gadgets must be reusable and repairable."
5. "Much electronic equipment is impossible to recycle."
6. "The scale of e-waste growth is shocking."

2 The sentences in Activity 1 are from an online newspaper editorial. Read the editorial and insert the sentences in the appropriate places.

The Guardian website interface is visible, showing the navigation bar with 'UK', 'world', 'sport', 'football', 'opinion', and 'culture' links. Below the navigation is a breadcrumb trail 'home > opinion > columnists'. The article title is 'Electronic waste: we must design gadgets that don't poison the planet'. Below the title is a subtext: 'We discard huge amounts of electronics every year, creating a toxic wasteland – often in the poorest countries.' The article is dated Saturday 14 December 2013 21.30 GMT. It has 203 shares and 107 comments. The author's photo shows a person sitting on a bed with a laptop.

Electronic waste: we must design gadgets that don't poison the planet

We discard huge amounts of electronics every year, creating a toxic wasteland – often in the poorest countries.



We love our gadgets, but we need to find safe ways of disposing of them.

The Observer Saturday 14 December 2013 21.30 GMT

203 Shares 107 comments

Record sales of tablets, laptops and smart phones. Ever smaller computers, and thinner televisions, brighter screens and sharper cameras. What could possibly be wrong with the worldwide explosion in sales of electrical and digital equipment seen this Christmas? Consumers love the sleek designs and the new connectivity they offer, businesses can't make enough for a vast and hungry global market, and governments see technological innovation and turnover as the quick

way out of recession. This is a new age of the machine and electronic equipment is indispensable in home and workplace.

But there is a downside to the revolution that governments and companies have so far ignored. In the drive to generate fast turnover and new sales, _____ and have shortened the lifespan of equipment.

Hardware is designed not to keep up with software, _____ and mobile phones are upgraded every few months. Many electronic devices now have parts that cannot be removed or replaced. From being cheaper to buy new devices than to repair them, it has now reached the point where it is impossible to repair them at all.

The result is that _____. As devices are miniaturised, they become increasingly complex. A single laptop may contain hundreds of different substances, dozens of metals, plastics and components which are expensive to dispose of. As we saw last week from Ghana, vast quantities of this dangerous “e-waste” is being dumped on developing countries where it is left to some of the poorest people to try to extract what they can in dangerous conditions.

_____ and has left governments and authorities behind. By 2017 it is expected that there will be more than 10 billion mobile-connected devices alone.

From under 10m tonnes of e-waste generated in 2000, it has now reached nearly 50m tonnes, with every sign that this will increase by 33% in the next five years. Britain will

discard over 1.3m tonnes of electronics this year, much of which will be buried in landfill, incinerated or exported.

The old corporate model of “take, make and chuck” is not sustainable. Our obsession with gadgetry and technology is now driving industry to open new mines around the world, squandering energy, biodiversity and water at every stage of extraction. Enormous areas of toxic wasteland are created and left for future generations to deal with.

Designing goods so they can be easily recycled is now critical. Companies must be challenged to rethink the way they make and source their materials to ensure there is no waste from start to finish.

_____, and built-in obsolescence discouraged. Companies, too, must become responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, especially when they become obsolete.

Governments must better monitor waste shipments from ports. E-waste is easy to conceal, and the black market is attracting organised crime. Natural resources have long been used to fuel violent conflict and human rights abuses, but now we must accept that gadgets can be equally dangerous. The sale of millions of computers and mobile phones, even the electronic toys that we will give this Christmas, is being driven by an increasingly flawed business model which is leading to a depleted and polluted planet.

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Extracted from www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/14/observer-editorial-electronic-toxic-waste. Accessed June 30, 2016.

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