



The Daily Gleaner

October 24, 2009

Reduce the Environmental Impact of Your Technology

In my September 26 column titled 'Making Progress on E-Waste' I presented some current problems and a few solutions for our computer-related waste in Fredericton (if you missed it, check it out at www.greenmattersfredericton.com under 'Green Matters in the Gleaner' button). I mentioned in the article that in coming weeks we would explore what to do about other non-computer e-waste. So this week's focus is on old batteries and cell phones.

First, it is key to remember that the first and most important 'R' in the 3 Rs is 'Reduce'; then 'Reuse' and 'Recycle'. This means we need to start taking action in our lives to reduce our use of batteries in the first place, and the batteries that we do use should be rechargeable ones, if possible.

Next, is the issue of frequent updating of our electronic gear, such as cell phones. When you purchase a cell phone or communication device, ensure that you are purchasing the one that will suit your needs for the long term so you won't have to upgrade frequently. The societal pressure to continually upgrade our electronic devices, coupled with the convincing marketing tactics around advances in our technological gadgets, is causing extraordinary e-waste issues in the world. So planning for your future requirements and ensuring you purchase a device that will suit your needs for at least 3-5 years is the first step to reducing e-waste.

So what should we do with our old cell phones and batteries? A fabulous program exists called 'Call2Recycle' (www.call2recycle.org). This is the only free rechargeable battery and cell phone collection program in North America. Their slogan is: "We invite you to join our efforts to advance green business practices and environmental sustainability". It is so easy! Just go to the website, pump in your postal code, and up pops a list of drop-off locations for this service. In Fredericton, this includes retailers such as: The Source, Canadian Tire, Home Depot and others.

The University of New Brunswick (UNB) has some wonderfully progressive e-waste initiatives that have been going on for nearly 5 years. The program includes toner cartridge recycling; cell phone and rechargeable battery recycling. UNB is working with the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (RBRC) to help keep used Nickel Cadmium (Ni-Cd), Nickel Metal Hydride (Ni-MH), Lithium Ion (Li-on), and Small Sealed Lead (Pb) batteries out of the waste stream. For more information check out www.unb.ca/bookstore/pcsales/green.html. Even if you are not a UNB student you can take your used toners, rechargeable batteries and old cell phones to the UNB Bookstore computer sales desk for free recycling!

The Bookstore program is not able to accept non-rechargeable Alkaline batteries for recycling. But for these, UNB has another program organized by 'Engineers Without Borders' (www.unb.ewb.ca). Collection bins are located at various sites around campus, including at all libraries.

And there are more options for Fredericton area residents! One is called 'E-Recycling at Future Shop'. The Future Shop Program commits to keeping electronics out of landfills. So simply drop the following items off in their in-store green box: used batteries, cell phones, CD players, MP3 players, CDs, portable DVD players, and ink cartridges. And another, is the EcoEasy program at Staples, which provides easy recycling services for items such as ink and toner cartridges, cell phones, rechargeable batteries, and electronics.

This past week was Waste Reduction Week in Canada. So it is nice to know our options for disposing of e-waste are growing rapidly and responsibly; and hence, our potential excuses for continuing to put this harmful waste in the landfill are rapidly depleting! But perhaps even more encouraging in this 'brave new world' is that the e-waste safe disposal movement is being primarily led by several large corporations (fittingly, the ones selling these items in the first place). Such corporate responsibility is the wave of the future.

In Fredericton we should be very proud of UNB for being such a progressive leader in this area for the past five years – hats off UNB, and thank you.

Sonya Hull is a consultant and project manager for Fredericton's environmental programs. Find out more @ www.greenmattersfredericton.com.