



## END-OF-LIFE MANAGEMENT OF YOUR SMARTPHONE

### E-WASTE

Let's start with a brief definition of electronic waste, popularly known as e-waste. E-waste describes discarded electrical or electronic devices. This includes old computers, mobile phones, appliances, mp3 players, tablets, USB sticks, printers, etc. Some break down, others become obsolete as technology advances and some are simply discarded because consumers want a newer model with better performance. Smartphones make up some, but not all, e-waste.

In Spain, an estimated 1067.40 tonnes (23.08 kg) of electronic products are thrown away each year, generating 832.93 tonnes of electronic waste, or just over 18 kg per person.

*While there are many reasons why e-waste reaches such astronomical numbers, there are two specifically that emerge as major causes: Excessive consumption and programmed obsolescence, that is, the policy some manufacturers and companies have of planning or designing a product with an artificially limited useful life, so that it becomes obsolete, unusable, useless or no longer functional after a certain period of time. Due to lack of spare parts, a new replacement has to be purchased. The purpose is to increase revenue, as consumers, addicted to their smartphones, are forced to make more frequent purchases, a situation that results in continuous economic benefits for longer periods of time for companies and manufacturers. The aim of obsolescence is not to create quality products, but focuses exclusively on profit, ignoring consumer needs and the environmental impact of production, even more so the consequences of the accumulation of waste and the pollution caused by devices designed with a short useful life.*

There are two main issues when it comes to smartphones. The first is that, although the useful life of a mobile is an estimated 10 years, consumers change phones every 18 months on average (data which dovetails with the phone plans of some providers). The second is that, although 90% of smartphone parts are recyclable, very few people actually recycle their phones.

Current protocol in Spain establishes the following steps in e-waste management. First, people should throw away their old phones at places designed to properly manage and recycle these devices, known as "green points", which are companies specialised in this service, the companies that sell smartphones, etc. The phones are sent from these collection points to e-waste treatment plants, where there are three possible outputs (they can also be sent to recycling centres, where there are given a second life). The first is breaking the phone down into parts that can be recycled and put back on the market, the second is energy assessment, and the last is disposal.

But not all states and countries have these same protocols, and compliance is not always guaranteed, even with international legislative frameworks like the Basel Convention. In this case, tonnes of e-waste is sent back to locations in Africa and Asia, where it ends up in landfills where the local population, living in very precarious conditions and at the risk of falling ill, recycles and sells this waste on the black market.

One of the most well-known landfills is Agbogbloshie<sup>1</sup> in Accra, the capital of Ghana. Agbogbloshie is known for the flames and fumes released from the burning of plastics and metal to get to the minerals that are sold in the local market, with the risk this entails for the health of the local community. There are increasingly more initiatives to address the issues at these landfills in an attempt to make this process less harmful to the population<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20120606/portada-ciberbasura-sin-fronteras/533464.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> See the "learn more" section about Kenya and women

# ACTIVITY PROPOSAL

## FILM FORUM AND SMARTPHONE COLLECTION

### Materials for the film forum:

Projector, computer with internet connection, the "Comprar, Tirar, Comprar (Buy, Toss, Buy)" documentary.  
Generate a discussion after the screening of the documentary.

### For the smartphone collection:

Organise a campaign at school, in your neighbourhood or broader local community.

### Come up with a slogan.

If it's in a school, you can make posters, design worksheets, organise a talk with parents and/or visit classes.

Design boxes where people can toss their old phones or request boxes from ALBOAN.

The following alternative can be used for younger groups:

Film: WALL-E

You can use the teaching unit available at:  
<https://www.intofilm.org/resources/341>



### Discussion

- When and why do people buy new phones?
- What can be done to reduce the amount of e-waste?
- What local alternatives are there for recycling or donating old phones?

## RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ▶ **Programmed obsolescence documentary:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdh7\\_PA8GZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdh7_PA8GZU)
- ▶ **The electronic tragedy:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wVZ8eKOgW8>
- ▶ **MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT:**  
<http://www.magrama.gob.es/es/calidad-y-evaluacion-ambiental/temas/prevencion-y-gestion-residuos/flujo/aparatos-electr/>
- ▶ **Article about FUHEM e-waste:**  
[https://www.fuhem.es/media/cdv/file/biblioteca/Boletin\\_ECOS/25/la-basura-tecnologica\\_D\\_LOPEZ\\_MARIJUAN.pdf](https://www.fuhem.es/media/cdv/file/biblioteca/Boletin_ECOS/25/la-basura-tecnologica_D_LOPEZ_MARIJUAN.pdf)
- ▶ **Video + news about women in Kenya who are changing the situation:**  
[http://noticias.efeamerica.com/56\\_videos/2561543\\_la-basura-electronica-una-oportunidad-de-negocio-para-las-mujeres-kenianas.html](http://noticias.efeamerica.com/56_videos/2561543_la-basura-electronica-una-oportunidad-de-negocio-para-las-mujeres-kenianas.html)
- ▶ **ToxiCity:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mleQVO1Vd11>
- ▶ **Global e-waste Monitor:** <https://www.ewaste.es/>  
[https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6341/Global-E-waste\\_Monitor\\_2017\\_\\_electronic\\_single\\_pages\\_.pdf](https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6341/Global-E-waste_Monitor_2017__electronic_single_pages_.pdf)
- ▶ **Blame Game (Documentary):** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrCcTiSL\\_Hg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrCcTiSL_Hg)

A project from:



[www.alboan.org](http://www.alboan.org)

For a:



[www.tecnologia LibreDeConflicto.org](http://www.tecnologia LibreDeConflicto.org)

Cooperate:

