

Stop! Take That Phone Out of the Trash...

Milton recycles its electronic waste responsibly. Well, Academy Technology Services, or ATS, lets a recycling center called Data Recycling pick up damaged or end-of-life Milton-owned equipment. Furthermore, a truck from the Junkluggers, a sustainable junk removal company, arrives on campus once a year in Earth Week to collect electronics from students, faculty, and staff. In fact, last year, Junkluggers left the school with nearly an entire truckload of electronics. However, students must be more responsible with their electronic waste disposal.

In a survey of 64 students, 60% of those who had previously discarded their devices had thrown them in bins meant for general waste, recycling, or trash. But electronic waste, or e-waste for short, does not belong in regular bins and causes serious consequences if disposed of improperly.

If a student throws away their phone along with plastic wrappers and food scraps, the phone will end up in the landfill instead of a responsible recycling center. Putting a device in a regular recycling bin is no better, if not worse: e-waste and other recycling waste such as plastic bottles and cans undergo different recycling processes. If an electronic device hides among other recyclable trash in the bin, the entire bag of recyclables will have to join the landfill. E-waste releases numerous [toxic substances](#) such as mercury and arsenic, and as a result, these chemicals not only contaminate the site but also spread to nearby communities. Consequently, people living in these communities will have higher chances of [asthma](#); in addition, exposure to air contaminants will put pregnant women at risk of [stillbirth](#).

By tossing unwanted electronics into regular bins, students contribute to the devastating effects that e-waste can bring to the environment and its inhabitants. Although e-waste is less common than other types of waste, students should not stay unaware of the appropriate way to discard their electronics.

For Milton students, one excellent way to responsibly dispose of e-waste is to keep any unwanted equipment until April, when Earth Week happens and a Junkluggers truck comes to collect people's electronics. The company then sorts through and processes the waste. Although the event proved successful last year, "on campus, we don't collect enough to fill up an entire truck," says Sustainability Coordinator Linnea Engstrom. Much of the e-waste the truck picks up comes from Milton townspeople—not just members of Milton Academy.

If a student needs to dispose of their device immediately and cannot wait until Earth Week rolls around, they need to find a recycling center that properly recycles e-waste. If they randomly choose where to donate their device, they are potentially entrusting their waste to a company that ships it to waste dumps in [developing countries](#) like Ghana, Pakistan, and Mexico.

To explain, one reason e-waste harms the health of so many lies in the job opportunities that such waste provides. Specifically, many companies send e-waste to electronic dumps in low- and middle-income countries where people can make money by burning or taking apart the devices. Many children, most of them extremely vulnerable to e-waste, participate in [cheap labor](#) by picking apart electronics to scavenge precious metals. Consequently, pervasive contaminants from the waste will likely [disrupt](#) childrens' nervous system growth.

Some argue that the e-waste processing industry in these countries is hardly a bad thing; workers will benefit financially, so companies should continue to send their e-waste over. However, such jobs rob people of their right to health, not to mention the severe risks chemicals pose to children, whose bodies are still developing. And we need to understand that the biggest reason this harmful industry thrives is that everyday people like us keep making irresponsible decisions, whether intentionally or not. We are the

ones who, through our actions, indirectly encourage people half the world away to work in hazardous conditions.

Just because Earth Week occurs in April does not mean that we should delay our sustainable endeavors. Store your e-waste and wait for Earth Week, or donate it to a trusted center—doing otherwise means further promoting environmental injustice.