Closing the loop

Key ideas

When we talk about the ways in which certain products are made, we use the expression, 'closing the loop'. The 'loop' refers to any production process – which takes resources in one form, puts them together and creates a product from them … as well as creating waste products too.

Energy, water and other natural resources are used up when we produce new items. Gases are released into the atmosphere and other by-products are created.

The time from the creation of a new product until it is recycled is called its 'life cycle'. Environmentally friendly producers aim to 'close the loop' that creates excess waste in the life cycles of their products.

By collecting and recycling the components or materials used to make a product, its life cycle can have less of an impact on the environment.

Problems and solutions

Some products that are being targeted by Australian organisations interested in closing the loop are mobile phones, televisions, computers and printer cartridges.

The information one the next page has been organised under negative and positive categories – to show the problems and solutions involved in closing the loop.

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Positive

Mobile phones are not biodegradable, and they contain some substances that can potentially harm the environment if not handled correctly at the end of a phone's useful life. So they should never be thrown out in the rubbish, where they can end up in landfill.

Televisions and computers contain materials which are hazardous both to humans and the environment when disposed of inappropriately.

Cartridges are one of the fastest growing forms of waste in Australia.

Negative

Over 90% of the materials used in a mobile are recyclable and can be reused, avoiding future greenhouse gas emissions, saving energy, protecting our environment and conserving scarce natural resources.

With the new National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme there is no need to put any of these items into your bin.

Making most products from recycled materials uses less water and energy than making them from new materials. By collecting cartridges and sending them for reprocessing or recycling we are able to recover materials like plastics, metals and inks that can then be used to make new products.

For more information on how you can help our environment, or to make some suggestions of your own, please go to www.coolaustralia.org