



## Out with the old

**Great shoppers are great editors, writes Daphne Gordon. Acquisition, they'll tell you, is only part of the experience. In fact, the way we discard our old purchases may be as important as the act of procurement**

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**DAPHNE GORDON**

Isn't the universe generous?

Perhaps, as you're reading this, you're sitting in a living room littered with the detritus of Christmas.

Over there in the corner, there's the new flat-screen TV that was this year's big gift to the family. Next to it on the floor, squats the grey old TV you inherited from Grandpa 15 years ago, now destined for greener pastures.

In the kitchen, your spouse is busily programming her new cell phone with a custom ring tone, while the old cell phone and its many accessories are already in the trash bin, on the verge of a trip to the curb.

And maybe, if Santa was particularly thoughtful this year, you can hear the kids in another room, noisily occupied with their new video gaming equipment, while the old console and last year's must-have games lie in a heap at their feet.

For many who celebrate the season's gift-giving tradition, Christmas can be a time to update big-ticket items like a winter coat, a family computer or



SHUTTERSTOCK IMAGE

### Added value

More than 140,000 tonnes of electronics equipment goes into Canadian landfills each year. That's equivalent to the weight of about 28,000 adult African elephants.

ENVIRONMENT CANADA

snowboard. It's a happy occasion.

And now it's time to pay it forward.

While eBay has opened up a new resale market for gently used electronics, sports equipment, clothes and other odds and sods, much of the stuff that we discard this time of year isn't worth the effort of finding a buyer.

But that doesn't mean you can throw them in the garbage. That would be irresponsible and now that sustainability is the new luxury, it's practically a social faux pas to put a hulking load of garbage out at the curb.

"Almost nothing should be going to the garbage," says Clarissa Morawski, a consultant on the topic of waste diversion and an active member of the Toronto Environmental Alliance, an education and advocacy group.

"Just about everything that leaves the household now is recyclable," says Morawski, who says her family of three puts out one small grocery bag of trash each week - while the blue box is full to overflowing.

Of course, paper and packaging are prime candidates for recycling in the blue box, as are bottles and cans. But lots of things that can't go into the box are recyclable if you're willing to do the research to find the right depot and drop it off there yourself, Morawski says.

It's particularly important to reuse or recycle electronics equipment, she notes.

Quoting a 2005 report about waste in Ontario, Morawski says less than 2 per cent of electronic waste (not including large appliances such as refrigerators) is diverted from landfill. In other words, 98 per cent of our e-waste ends up in the ground.

That's very bad news. Electronic equipment contains toxic materials, including lead, cadmium and mercury, which can pollute the soil and groundwater when disposed of in landfills. For example, computer and television monitors with cathode ray tubes contain, on average, four to eight pounds of lead, a highly toxic heavy metal.

"This is not the kind of thing you want to just throw in the landfill," says Morawski. "Diverting these substances is extremely important. Here we are in a world where you can't even eat fish if you're pregnant, or give certain fish to your kids because of mercury. And we're considering doing things that are going to make that far, far worse."

The e-waste problem is becoming urgent, notes Morawski. Canada has yet to legislate, as most European countries have, that producers make less toxic products to begin with, then take responsibility for responsible disposal.

Some Canadian companies - Dell and Hewlett Packard, for example - voluntarily offer take-back programs. But that's the exception to the norm in a bustling electronics marketplace, where brands proliferate and new products pop up daily.

"We go through electronics at a faster rate than we ever have in history and we

have many different forms of electronics, so it's a much greater issue today than ever before," says Morawski.

If you look outside at your mushy brown lawn and barren front path, the sense of urgency should become very real.

"Maybe this is a wake-up call for people," says Morawski. "It's 10 degrees outside, and it's Christmas. We're all responsible for making a change."

Toronto Mayor David Miller has called on citizens to get on board in a city-wide effort to reduce the amount of trash we ship to landfill in Michigan. Torontonians divert about 40 per cent of all waste to recycling. Miller aims to up that number to 70 per cent by 2010.

So in the true spirit of Christmas, let's all make an effort this year to clean up our act and dispose of our cast-off stuff responsibly, first by finding others who might want to make use of the items, and then, if that's not possible, by recycling the raw materials.

We've compiled a partial list of organizations that will help. Though there are many private companies who recycle stuff for profit, we've focused our list on non-profit organizations that collect and redistribute goods to people who really need them or raise funds to support their organizations by collecting and selling recyclables.

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No matter what you're trying to pass on, freecycle.org should be your first stop. Toronto's freecycle community has about 5,000 members and membership is free. Find a home for stuff you thought was useless by posting a message describing it and stating your location and soon, you'll have an inbox full of messages from people willing to adopt your thingamajig. And most will come and pick it up.

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When it comes to electronics, there are many organizations in Toronto that recycle. Some are more responsible than others. But reusing is better for the environment than recycling.

If your computer is salvageable, consider donating to ReBoot, a local non-profit organization that accepts donations of computer equipment, then distributes them to non-profit organizations and individuals with limited access to technology.

Computers that don't work are refurbished, and anything that can't be fixed is responsibly recycled. You get a tax receipt for the market value of your computer. For more info, see [rebootcanada.ca](http://rebootcanada.ca) or call 416-534-6017.

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To donate gently-used sports equipment, try Kidsport Ontario, a non-profit that redistributes it to needy kids. For info about where to drop it off, see [kidsport.on.ca](http://kidsport.on.ca) or call 416-426-7171.

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To give a used cell phone to a good cause, donate to Phones For Food, a collection project that benefits Canadian food banks. See [think-food.com](http://think-food.com) or call 416-516-7465.

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For ink jet and laser printer cartridges, call the Canadian Diabetes Association's Recycle Ink program, which sells the cartridges to a local company for re-manufacturing. For drop-off locations and other information, see [diabetes.ca](http://diabetes.ca) and click on "support us" or call 1-800-226-8464, extension 7139.

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For clothing, the possibilities are endless. Goodwill ([goodwill.on.ca](http://goodwill.on.ca)) and Salvation Army ([nro.salvationarmy.ca](http://nro.salvationarmy.ca)) are easy options because they have many depots locally, but to donate more directly to people who really need clothing, try giving your used duds to organizations that distribute them to the people they help. But call ahead before you go. Try the WoodGreen Red Door Family Shelter, 416-469-4123, or the Jane Finch Community Family Centre at 416-663-2733.

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Arts and crafts supplies will go to good use if you donate to Sketch, a local non-profit that uses art to help homeless or at-risk kids. See [sketch.ca](http://sketch.ca) or call 416-516-5428.

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For gently-used equipment, clothes and toys for moms and babies, try Jessie's Centre for Teenagers, which helps pregnant teens and teenaged parents. See [jessiescentre.org](http://jessiescentre.org) or call 416-365-1888.

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Furniture, small appliances and household items will go directly to a family in need if you donate to the non-profit Furniture Bank, which will pick up large items. See [furniturebank.org](http://furniturebank.org) or call 416-934-1229.

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Leftover renovation supplies will find a new life with Habitat for Humanity, which operates thrift stores for selling donated goods. For info, see [torontohabitat.on.ca](http://torontohabitat.on.ca) or call 416-755-8023.

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For hazardous household waste, which includes paints and solvents, used motor oil, poisons, pesticides, medicines and needles, go to one of the City of Toronto's six depots. For locations, see [www.toronto.ca](http://www.toronto.ca) and click on the "garbage and recycling" link.

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Recycle your car responsibly by donating it to Car Heaven, [carheaven.ca](http://carheaven.ca) or call 416-922-9038, extension 240.

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Air conditioners contain toxic chemicals, so dispose of an old one with care. When you turn an old air conditioner over to Keep Cool, a program of the Clean Air Foundation, you get a coupon worth \$25 for a new, more energy-efficient air conditioner. See [keepcool.ca](http://keepcool.ca) or call 1-800-545-7089.