

# BLUE BIN NEWS

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## Recycling Your Cell Phone: What Happens?

More than 130 million cell phones in the US alone are retired every year. Not great news for the planet, considering phones contain substances harmful to humans and the environment, like cadmium, lead, and beryllium (all carcinogens), as well as arsenic. So what's the best way to make sure your old phone's not leaking chemicals into the ground?

- Most major wireless carriers participate in "take-back" programs, which allow you to send your dead phone back where it came from for free—or sometimes even a cash rebate. Once a cell phone arrives at a take-back facility, if it's still workable and a relatively recent model, it's likely going to get refurbished and resold, either on the consumer market or to a charity. (Verizon's HopeLine program, for example, donates phones loaded with 3,000 free minutes to domestic violence victims.)

***For a list of local electronic-collection sites, visit:***  
***[www.ecyclestlouis.org](http://www.ecyclestlouis.org)***



- If your phone is really kaput, it will either get broken down and sold for parts or passed on to a smelter, where the entire phone is melted down and the liquids are separated to be reconstituted. Smelters harvest the little bits of valuable metals (gold, copper, iron, silver, zinc, nickel, platinum, tin) used in the circuitboards and soldering.

- You can help minimize waste by opting for a refurbished phone (available through all major carriers) instead of a new one. Once you're done with your phone, there are a number of recycling systems you can participate in. To reduce the carbon footprint from ground transportation and reclamation, programs that handle large volumes of cell phones. Best Buy has kiosks in nearly every store where you can drop off your used electronics. (Courtesy Mother Jones, November 2010)

# SOME ECO-FRIENDLY TIPS...

Practice green living with these recycling tips and water-saving ideas.

◆ **Vinegar:** This household staple can be used in combination with equal parts water to clean your coffeemaker; clean drains by pouring down the pipes for 30 minutes then flushing with cold water; and combat mineral deposits in shower overheads by pouring vinegar into a plastic grocery bag, knotting the handles over the neck of the showerhead, secure with rubber bands, soak overnight, rinse with water in the morning.



◆ **Table salt:** Sprinkle salt on cookware to absorb excess grease. Dump out the salt before washing as usual. (Not recommended for nonstick cookware.) Also, If that casserole bubbles over as you take it out of the oven, pour salt on the spill to soak it up. When the oven is cool, wipe with a damp sponge.

◆ **Use Cold Water:** Wash clothes in cold water. You may already know that this saves energy, but do you know how much? “Up to 90 percent of the cost of washing clothes comes from heating the water, so use hot water only for very dirty clothes,” says Adam Gottlieb of the California Energy Commission. Another tip: “Match the water level to the amount of clothes, or wait to wash full loads,” suggests Clement. “The water savings can be enormous.” (Courtesy *Real Simple*, April 2012)



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