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Dialed In

Contributing Editor Grace Aquino taps into the world of mobile phones and services--and provides tips on how to make them work efficiently.



Cell Phone Recycling

When you're ready to give away your old handset, your carrier is probably ready to help.

Grace Aquino, PC World
Wednesday, December 22, 2004

Recycling your old cell phone is not only good for the environment and your karma, it's also often good for your taxes. Many carriers and nonprofit organizations make it easy for you to drop off and donate your unwanted handset and accessories, and they'll take care of the rest.

With so many freebie phone offers these days, it's easy to just chuck your old phone in the dumpster or your basement. The smarter and more environmentally friendly option is to donate your phone to a nonprofit such as [California Recycles](#), [CollectiveGood](#), [Donate Phone](#), and [Recycle for Breast Cancer](#).

To find local cell-phone recycling locations, head to [Earth 911](#) and type in your zip code; to find manufacturers' local collection locations, go to [Wireless: The New Recyclable](#).

If you'd like to start your own fundraising program, check out the [Funding Factory](#) and the [Wireless Fundraiser.com](#) for information.

What to Do Before You Donate

Before giving away your old phone, first erase all stored information, including your phone book, text messages, and incoming/outgoing phone numbers. Many handsets feature a manual reset in the settings menu that should erase data and restore the phone's default settings. Check your phone's manual for details.

Second, make sure your account has been completely terminated. Some recycled phones are resold and put back in the market, like used cars. When a new owner starts using your old phone, you don't want to be getting the bill.

Green Day

Each of the five nationwide carriers offers a recycling program of some sort. At least two use third-party recycling companies such as [ReCellular](#) and [GRC](#).

[See all newsletters](#)

[Wireless Recycling](#). Both these companies work with carriers and nonprofit organizations to provide the infrastructure for reusing or recycling phones, batteries, and other wireless accessories. Both companies also have donation programs of their own that benefit various nonprofit organizations in the U.S.

[AT&T Wireless/Cingular Reuse & Recycle](#): This tax-deductible program (a printable receipt is provided at the Web site) recycles old phones, accessories and batteries. Bring your old equipment to any AT&T Wireless or Cingular store and AT&T/Cingular will donate proceeds to the Keep America Beautiful organization, which focuses on removing litter from the environment, minimizing waste, and improving communities. Businesses can request that their unwanted equipment be picked up by filling out a form on AT&T/Cingular's site. AT&T/Cingular also participates in the Environmental Protection Agency's [Plug Into eCycling](#) campaign, which seeks to increase the number of electronic devices collected and safely recycled in the United States.

Although AT&T Wireless and Cingular have merged, Cingular still maintains its [original recycling program](#) on its Web site. The company collects old phones and sends them to its recycling facility to be tested, evaluated, and sorted. Repairable phones are reissued as part of an entry-level kit, put into service secondary markets, or used for warranty exchanges. Phones that can't be fixed are recycled for parts. In some cases, Cingular sends donated phones to the Wireless Foundation's [Call to Protect Program](#), which supports shelters for battered women by providing refurbished cell phones.

[Nextel American Red Cross Donate a Phone Program](#): Donations of old cell phones, batteries, and accessories currently raise money to help the American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Services program, which provides emergency communications to the U.S. military and their families across the country and worldwide. You can leave donations at a Nextel shop or a NASCA Nextel Cup series race. Nextel recycles and refurbishes the phones, and you receive a tax write-off.

Nextel customers can also participate in the company's [Buyback Program](#), which gives qualified participants who turn in their phones account credit or a donation receipt for tax purposes. To determine whether a phone is eligible, Nextel customers can hop on to the [company's site](#).

[Sprint Project Connect](#): This program collects and recycles old phones to raise money for people with disabilities. Donated cell phones are either recycled or resold and the proceeds are given to Easter Seals and the National Organization on Disability. You can unload your unwanted handsets and accessories at any Sprint store or you can mail them in (Sprint's site even provides a [shipping label](#)). Note that Sprint will not delete the data from your old phone, so remember to purge your info before making your donation. Donations are tax deductible; you can pick up a receipt at your Sprint drop-off location or you can get the receipt from Sprint's [site](#).

[T-Mobile Get More, Give More](#): The company accepts all models of its mobile phones, batteries, PDAs, and accessories for recycling. T-Mobile advises that you remove all personal information from your old phone before dropping it off at a T-Mobile store or mailing it in. The company will then decide whether it should repair, refurbish, recycle, or resell your phone. Proceeds go to the American Cross Disaster Relief Fund, which helps support hurricane relief efforts in Florida and elsewhere.

[Verizon Wireless HopeLine](#): This program recycles and refurbishes used cell phones and accessories to help victims of domestic violence. Verizon sells so

of the refurbished phones, but the money goes back into buying handsets and donating airtime minutes to domestic violence victims. Verizon says it will delete any information stored on the phone. You can drop off a donation at any Verizon Wireless store, or you can mail it in. For the address and additional details, call 800/426-2790. Your donation will not be tax deductible since Verizon isn't set up to provide the proper documentation; so you might want to find a charity that can give you a receipt.

Got a question or comment? Write to [Grace Aquino](#).

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