

The green gadgets test

April 04, 2009

Green is hot right now and consumer electronics makers better keep up. In its latest edition of Guide to Greener Electronics, environment campaign group Greenpeace has asked manufacturers, especially laptop makers, to "come clean on green issues".

"Producers only go green when they feel public and consumer pressure to do so," it said. "The phase-out of toxic substances is an urgent priority to help tackle the growing tide of e-waste."

The guide, updated every three months and published this week, ranks 17 top manufacturers of personal computers, mobile phones, TVs and games consoles according to their policies on toxic chemicals, recycling and climate change.

The non-profit organisation had strong words for laptop makers HP, Lenovo and Dell, who they claim "had promised to eliminate vinyl plastic (PVC) and brominated flame retardants (BFRs) from their products by the end of 2009.

"Now they've told us that they won't make it this year," the report said, and added: "Of the world's five top PC makers, only Apple is truly kicking the habit."

Greenpeace also praised Dutch electronics giant Philips for what it called a "dramatic about-turn on recycling and take-back".

"It's jumped from 15th to fourth place in one go. Following public pressure, the company has significantly improved its position on taking financial responsibility for the recycling of its products when they become e-waste.

"Exposing electronics companies to public pressure is helping to green the industry," Greenpeace said. "They could do much more."

Here's the Greenpeace Guide to Greener Electronics, with each company rated out of 10:

7.5: Nokia

Keeps top spot with new CO2 emissions reduction targets. Nokia stays in first place with an improved total score of 7.5. It now scores maximum points for its comprehensive voluntary take-back programme, which spans 84 countries providing almost 5,000 collection points for end-of-life mobile phones. However, it needs to start using recycled plastics beyond just packaging.

6.9: Samsung

Up two places with clear support for global climate change cuts. Samsung leaps to second place, up from fourth from the last Guide and increases its score from 5.9 to 6.9, scoring relatively well on all criteria. Since November 2007, all new models of LCD panels are PVC-free.

5.7: Sony Ericsson

Down one place with more work to do on recycling. Sony drops one place to third with a reduced score of 5.7, losing a point for its limited definition of the principle of Individual Producer Responsibility (IPR), which measures how efficiently a company deals with e-waste that is created from their own products that are thrown away. But it's the first company to score almost top marks on the chemicals criteria, missing this target by having unreasonably high threshold limits for BFRs in products that are allegedly BFR-free.

5.7: Philips

Biggest mover, up 11 places due to big recycling policy improvements. Philips soars up the ranking from 15th place to fourth, scoring 5.7. Philips also scores a point for its voluntary take-back and for reporting on the recycling rate of the electronic waste (e-waste) it collects in Europe and now needs to demonstrate its commitment to taking responsibility for its own e-waste by expanding its take-back programme and improving the information that it provides to its customers.

5.5: Sony

Up two places with better product energy efficiency reporting. Sony moves up to fifth and increases its score to 5.5. It gains points on the energy efficiency of its products by reporting that all new models of TVs released in 2008 meet the latest Energy Star (ES) requirements.

5.5: LG Electronics

Loses points for delaying toxics phase out for all products. LG Electronics remains in sixth position, although its score drops from 5.7 to 5.5, losing points for backtracking on its commitment to have all its products free of PVC and BFRs by 2010. Now, only mobile products will be free of these toxic substances from 2010; the timeline for eliminating them in TVs and monitors has been delayed until after 2012.

5.3: Toshiba

Loses points for poor CO2 reduction target and missing energy efficiency data. Toshiba drops to seventh place with a reduced score of 5.3, losing points on the chemicals and energy criteria. The reporting of the energy efficiency of its PCs is unclear and on TVs, Toshiba reports only on the efficiency of US TVs; the data on models exceeding the latest ES standard is confusing.

5.3: Motorola

Down one place, needs to improve on waste and energy. Motorola drops from seventh to eighth place, with a score of 5.3 points, losing points on reporting its recycling rate and on energy, for failing to publish its third party verification certificate of CO2 equivalent emissions. However, it also gains points on energy for reporting that from November 1, 2008, all newly designed Motorola mobile phone chargers meet and exceed by 67 per cent the new Energy Star v.2.0 requirements for standby/no-load modes.

4.9: Sharp

Unchanged – gains point for new US recycling scheme, loses one for weaker commitment on global emissions reduction. Sharp moves up the ranking from 10th place to ninth with an unchanged overall score of 4.9 points. It gains points for improved chemicals management and it also provides a timeline of fiscal 2010 for eliminating phthalates and antimony.

4.7: Apple

Up four places, good on chemicals elimination, improved on recycling but still poor on energy. Apple's score increases to 4.7 points and the company leaps to tenth position – up from 14th. All Apple products are now free of PVC and BFRs with the exception of PVC-free power cords, which are in the process of being certified. The company needs to be commended for running a bold advertising campaign highlighting the green credentials of its MacBooks.

4.5: Acer

Score drops slightly due to poor e-waste. Acer has dropped slightly from 4.7 to 4.5 points, but it stays in 11th place. The company is not penalised for backtracking on its commitment to eliminate PVC vinyl plastic and BFRs in all products by the end of 2009 as internal communication with Acer reveals that it believes it can still meet this commitment.

4.3: Panasonic

Down three places due to poor definition of precautionary principle and energy efficiency reporting. Panasonic falls from ninth to 12th place and its score drops to 4.3 points, as a result of

losing points for its confusing definition of the Precautionary Principle, a moral code or responsibility to intervene and protect the public from exposure to harm.

3.7: Dell

Continues to drop, penalty point for breaking commitment to phase out of toxics by end 2009.

Dell has been dropping down the ranking from fifth place to eight and to 12th in subsequent guides and is now in 13th position, with a reduced score of 3.7 points. Dell's score has plummeted due to the penalty point imposed for backtracking on its commitment to eliminate PVC and BFRs in all its products by the end of 2009. Dell no longer has a timeline for eliminating these nasty substances.

3.1: Lenovo

Penalty point for breaking commitment phase out of toxics by the end of 2009. Lenovo climbs to 14th position despite its score dropping to 3.1 points, encumbered by a penalty point imposed for backtracking on its commitment to eliminate PVC and BFRs in all its products by the end of 2009. Lenovo has now moved the timeline for meeting this commitment to end of 2010.

2.7: Microsoft

Score drops due to bad performance on e-waste. Microsoft rises to 15th position although its score drops to 2.7 points, as it loses a point for failing to clarify how its recycling data is calculated. It reports that it financed the collection and recycling of e-waste equivalent to 17 per cent of worldwide sales in 2007.

2.7: HP

Penalty point for breaking commitment to phase out of toxics by end 2009. HP drops from 13th to penultimate (16th) position weighed down by a penalty point imposed for backtracking on its commitment to eliminate PVC and BFRs in computing products by the end of 2009. Although it still communicates this timeline on its website, in a call with Greenpeace in February 2009, the company admitted that it would be unable to meet its commitment.

0.8: Nintendo

Remains in last place, with an unchanged score. The Japanese giant, headquartered in Kyoto, remains in last place with a pitiful 0.8 points out of 10, scoring zero on all e-waste criteria.

Although it is endeavouring to eliminate the use of PVC, it has not set a timeline for its phase out. Nintendo discloses carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from its own operations and commits to cutting CO₂ emissions and other greenhouse gases by two per cent over each previous year. However, Nintendo admits that an increase in business led to a six per cent rise in CO₂ emissions in 2006.

{Emirates Business 24/7}