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In praise of... recycling mobiles

The mobile phone is one of the most successful products ever manufactured. Half of the people on the planet now have one, excluding multiple ownership. It is also the most versatile product ever devised, since it devours other devices from MP3 players to GPS satellite tracking units. Well over half of all phones in circulation now have cameras, even if they are irregularly used. But success brings problems. The pace of change and the pull of fashion is such that, globally, mobile phones are replaced every 15 months. This will change during the recession, but it still means that hundreds of millions are being discarded every year that could have a useful life. Particularly so in developing countries, where they are proving a boon for productivity and a catalyst for the birth of industries such as mobile banking. A survey by FoneBank.com, a trade-in website, found that only 20% of UK consumers are recycling their mobiles, while 28% put them away in a drawer and 23% throw them away. It would be better to recycle them. Websites such as tinyurl.com/8gswhr and tinyurl.com/6uebob offer useful hints about what to do with mobiles which are surplus to requirements. There is another compelling reason to recycle: mobiles contain substances, such as cadmium in the batteries, that can harm the water supply. Recycling mobiles offers the double advantage of making a modest contribution to help developing countries while avoiding, or at least postponing, environmental degradation.