

TODAY'S ZAMAN

Turks discard \$14 billion worth of mobile phones

Turks are spending a fortune to buy mobile phones and throwing away billions of dollars as these devices rapidly become outdated, with consumers always looking to replace what they have with newer and more advanced devices.

Nearly \$14 billion worth of imported cellular phones were dumped between 1994, when mobile communications services first launched in Turkey, and 2006. According to figures provided by the Mobile Devices Registry System, supervised by the Information Technologies and Communications Board (BTK), the number of phones registered with unique IMEI numbers since registry became obligatory in December 2005 has reached 113 million.



Estimates show Turks as having spent \$22 billion for mobile phone purchases since 1994.

The damage does not affect the economy alone, however. Recycling obsolete devices is regarded as especially important when it comes to mobile phones as they inflict relatively heavier damage on the environment than normal electronic equipment due to the plastics and non-recyclable parts they are made of.

Speaking to the Anatolia news agency, representatives from Exitcom, a recycling company operating in Turkey, Germany and Hong Kong, said they have collected 1,305 tons of electronic waste in Turkey since 2003. Computers and home appliances make up the majority of this waste. Only 3.5 tons of this amount comes from mobile phones, they noted. However, this situation is not unique to Turkey, they underline, adding that mobile phone recycling is very low even in Germany.

An ordinary mobile phone is made up of roughly 300 different materials. Of these materials, 56 percent are plastics while 5 percent are metals. Other parts are non-recyclable elements such as the LCD screen.

Disposing of these devices in normal trashcans leads to environmental damage and human health endangerment as hazardous materials, such as copper, nickel, silver, lead, epoxy, cobalt, beryllium and cadmium, leak into the soil. Recycled cellular phone batteries are used in the production of new batteries and steel casing. Metals used in their electronic circuits are reused in electronic and medical equipment while plastic parts end up in new traffic cones. Other plastic parts are mainly used in the production of car bumpers.

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