



Green Electronics: The Good, the Bad and the Better

Electronics has made our life easier, but it has a murky side as well. Many materials used in electronic products are toxic and pose a threat to the environment. The harmful elements used in electronic gadgets include polyvinyl chloride (PVC), brominated flame retardants (BFR), beryllium, lead, cadmium, mercury, and polybrominated diphenyl ether (PBDE).

It is possible to make clean, durable products that can be upgraded, recycled, or disposed of safely and don't end up as hazardous waste. The industry is resorting to green electronics. Green electronics focuses on elimination of harmful elements and components, and safe recycling of electronic products at the end of life.

Greenpeace Guide

Greenpeace — an international environmental NGO — launched in August 2006 a 'Guide to Greener Electronics'. In May 2010 came the 15th edition of the guide, which ranks the 18 top manufacturers of personal computers, mobile phones, TVs and games consoles according to their policies on toxic chemicals, recycling and climate change. The Indian version of the May 2010 guide ranks 4 Indian information technology (IT) companies — Wipro, HCL, Zenith and PCS Technology.

Besides informing consumers on the companies that are doing the most to mitigate the environmental impact of their products, the guide aims to clean up the electronics sector and get manufacturers to take responsibility for the full life cycle of their products, including the electronic waste that their products generate.

Ranking Criteria

Greenpeace used three broad criteria — toxic chemicals, e-waste and energy — each of them divided into five sub categories. The ranking criteria reflect the demands of the Greenpeace's 'Toxic Tech' campaign to the electronics companies. The campaign demands that the companies should clean up their products by eliminating hazardous substances; take back and recycle their products responsibly once they become obsolete and; reduce the climate impacts of their operations and products.

Though Greenpeace did not rank companies on labour standards, mining, or any other issues, it recognises that these are important in the production and use of electronics products. The rankings were based solely on public information on the companies' website.

The Scorecard

Companies scored marks out of 51. To simplify the scorecard, scores were calculated to a mark out of 10. The scorecard

highlights which of the major electronics companies is doing the most to remove the worst toxic chemicals from their products and have good recycling policy.

The Indian IT major Wipro shares the top position with Nokia scoring 7.5; Sony Ericsson ranked second and Indian software major HCL ranked third scoring 6.9 and 6.7, respectively.

Wipro retained its position at the top of the Indian version of the greenpeace guide. Since the last ranking, HCL improved its performance on both the chemicals and energy criteria, which helped it reach the third spot, including all Indian and multinational companies. Both Wipro and HCL launched PVC and BFR - free products earlier this year. Zenith and PCS technology could not improve on their score and remain at the bottom of the guide.

Toshiba and Samsung were awarded penalty points along with Dell and LG electronics. Samsung was awarded two penalty points for backtracking on its commitment to eliminate BFRs and PVCs from its products. It earned additional penalty point for misleading customers and Greenpeace by not admitting that it would not meet its public commitment of meeting the timeline. Dell continues to receive penalty points by failing to launch any new products free from PVC & BFR. It also failed to provide a roadmap to phase out these chemicals from its new products. Toshiba, Dell, Lenovo, LGE and Samsung have broken their promises to eliminate PVC and BFRs from their products.

Sources: www.greenpeace.org/international, greenpeace.org/india



International Ranking of Electronics Companies (May 2010)

Nokia (7.5), Sony Ericsson (6.9), Philips (5.1), Motorola (5.1), Apple (4.9), Panasonic (4.9), Sony (4.9), HP (4.9), Sharp (4.5), Dell (4.3), Acer (4.1), LG Electronics (3.7), Samsung (3.5), Toshiba (3.5), Fujitsu (3.5), Microsoft (3.3), Lenovo (1.9), Ninetendo (1.8).

Ranking of Indian Companies (May 2010)

Wipro (7.5), HCL (6.7), Zenith (1.4), PCS Technology (1.0)

