

Summary Report

Consumer Attitudes to the Use of Recycled Materials in Electrical and Electronic Products



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An assessment of consumer views on the use of recycled materials in electrical and electronic products, and the potential influence on purchasing decision.

WRAP helps individuals, businesses and local authorities to reduce waste and recycle more, making better use of resources and helping to tackle climate change.

Front cover photography: A Sony KDL-32JE1 LCD Television made with recycled plastic, an example of an electronic product with recycled content.

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Key facts

- WRAP has completed a set of consumer focus groups to assess their views on the use of recycled materials in electrical and electronic products. In particular, WRAP wanted to understand whether there were thresholds to acceptance of certain materials and whether their use in high-value items was acceptable to members of the public.
- For all groups, key influencing factors in the purchase decision included price, specification, brand, aesthetics, value for money, quality, reliability and customer service.
- Environmental factors were not high in groups' awareness, except in some cases where members had recently purchased white goods (that are clearly energy rated).
- There was no awareness of recycled content in electronic products – either that it might be used or that it is already in use in some cases.
- When examples of products with recycled content were discussed, groups immediately considered function, value, style and brand rather than the recycled content itself. This shows that recycled content was readily acceptable and did not discourage interest.
- Recycled content was widely acceptable to the groups and in some cases generated interest in products and brands. There was almost no adverse reaction to the use of recycled materials in any products.
- Appropriate labelling of recycled content (and green issues more widely) might influence the purchase decision of consumers, provided other factors are broadly equivalent.

Study aim and methodology

WRAP wishes to promote the appropriate use of recycled materials in new products. However, without an understanding of consumers' views, this might be a risky decision for a manufacturer.

Aim of the work

WRAP wanted to understand consumers' awareness and views on the use of recycled materials in electrical and electronic (EEE) products. This would inform WRAP's future work on the promotion of using recycled materials in the manufacture of new products.

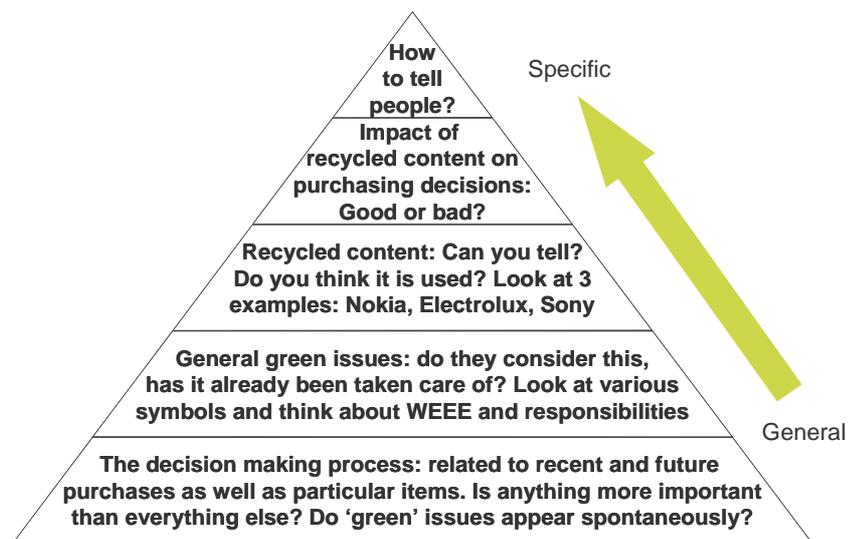
Ipsos MORI was appointed to undertake focus group sessions to gauge consumer opinions.

Methodology: Focus Groups

Eight sessions were set up, each with eight participants and with a range of ages, social groups and views on environmental issues. In all cases, recruited group members were active purchasers of electronic products either for themselves or on behalf of their households.

Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Active consumer	All	All	All	All	All	All	All	All
Age	18-40	41-65	18-40	41-65	18-40	41-65	18-40	41-65
Env issues	Pro	Neutral	Neutral	Pro	Pro	Neutral	Neutral	Pro
Gender	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix
Soc Grade	ABC1	ABC1	C1C2	ABC1	C1C2	ABC1	ABC1	ABC1
Location	London	London	B'ham	B'ham	E'burgh	E'burgh	Bristol	Bristol

The groups were led through a discussion guide that started with general issues affecting their selection of electronic products then worked through environmental issues towards recycled content specifically.



The groups were shown examples of electronic products with recycled content:

- Sony's approach to recycled content, including LCD televisions, cameras and camcorders
- a Nokia "Remade" concept mobile phone
- an Electrolux "Ultrasilencer Green" vacuum cleaner

Findings

Summary of Group Discussions

Key decision factors

When asked what aspects of electronic products influence their purchasing decision, the focus groups consistently listed the following:

- Price
- Functionality
- Value for money
- Brand
- Aesthetics or style
- Quality
- Customer service

When washing machines were discussed then energy efficiency was recognised as a factor by all groups. No other environmental aspects were raised.

Green aspects of electronic products

Groups were then prompted on “green” considerations of electronic products. When discussing washing machines almost all group members mentioned energy efficiency but recognised that this was not associated with all goods (such as digital cameras). A few members raised packaging as an issue, and some perceived that items have a shorter design life than in the past.

When waste was specifically raised, then packaging was highlighted, along with product life span and reparability.

Use of recycled materials

The use of recycled materials was raised in the groups and explained in detail.

- Most group members assumed that new products contained little or no recycled content, because this is not labelled clearly.
- No group members felt they would be able to tell the difference between virgin and recycled materials.

Examples of products with recycled content

Groups were shown pictures of three products known to contain recycled materials:

- Sony's approach to recycled content, including LCD televisions, cameras and camcorders.
- An Electrolux "Ultrasilencer Green" vacuum cleaner with 55% recycled plastic content.
- A Nokia "Remade" concept phone design using recycled aluminium from drinks cans and rubber from car tyres.

In all cases, groups immediately reverted to discussions on function, aesthetics, brand and cost before considering the recycled content.

The use of recycled materials was generally welcomed in all groups. There was no adverse reaction to specific materials, such as plastics, or to the use of recycled materials in high-value and high-technology goods such as televisions. A small number of people perceived recycled materials to be a lower quality than virgin materials, although this was often acknowledged with a lack of understanding of recycling. There was a common perception that "green products" would be a lower specification and higher price. However, recycled content was considered an added bonus if all other factors were equal. Groups had a positive view of companies that used recycled materials.

Impact on purchase decision

All groups considered that recycled content was an interesting factor, and would welcome clear labelling of recycled content on products. However, it would still be lower on the list than the primary considerations discussed above.

A common perception was that “green” products typically cost more and offer less specification than typical products. It is important that this perception is addressed in product information.

A view commonly expressed was that if all other aspects such as price, functionality and reliability were equal then recycled content might positively influence the purchasing decision. To have any influence, recycled content would have to be clearly indicated on the product information.

There appears to be a low-risk opportunity for labelling of recycled content on electronic products. In some cases this information will positively sway the purchase decision, in other cases it would not influence the decision but would not detract from the product or brand.

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