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# Ricoh does its part

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## A takeback system diverts toner cartridges and other office equipment from landfills.

THE green bench at Ricoh Malaysia's office lobby in Shah Alam may look unremarkable, but it is made wholly from recycled parts.

"The bench is made from 1,500 recycled printer cartridges," a Ricoh marketing executive said.

The technology to make this bench is unavailable in Malaysia, so the bench, which costs RM1,500 each, is imported from Australia where it is made. Ricoh Malaysia also sponsored a few of these "green benches" to be placed at the Medan Tunku monorail station in Kuala Lumpur on June 5, 2009.



New uses: Toner cartridges collected from customers are sent to a recycling facility in Malacca, says Ricoh general manager of service operations Lee Choon Heng.

"We imported the benches to create awareness that Ricoh can make such items from recycled materials of its products," said general manager of service operations Lee Choon Heng.

The company has been taking steps to ensure that the products they manufacture do not end up in landfills. From 2008 to 2010, it produced 292 tonnes of photocopying machines, 38 tonnes of toner cartridges and bottles, and five tonnes of spare parts.

"If these were not recycled, they would've gone straight to the landfill," said Lee.

And this is unacceptable to the company, which has been listed in the Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World for the past seven years. This year, it ranked 75th. (Canadian company Corporate Knights Inc began the Global

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100 list in 2005.)

In 2001, the company began its Toner Cartridge Takeback Programme.

“Ricoh has a ‘zero waste to landfill’ programme and we help our customers reduce their eco footprint,” said Lee. “We encourage our customers to call us, and we will pick up the used toner cartridges and parts.”

However, customers did not immediately respond to their efforts and initial collection numbers were low.

“We used to ask service engineers and contractors to bring back the parts. But it was a difficult effort until we put incentives in place. Now, for every toner bottle taken back, they will get RM2 while drums fetch RM5,” said Lee.

Thanks to the incentives, more customers began returning the cartridges instead of throwing them away.

To ensure that the process is truly green, technicians and contractors are instructed not to clean out the remaining ink in the cartridges with water as the ink could pollute the environment. Instead, the ink is vacuumed out of the cartridges.

“It’s a more expensive, technical and troublesome process but it is environmentally friendly,” said Lee.

The company spends about RM10,000 a month to collect used toner cartridges. It pays a recycling centre to process the used products. It currently collects back about 85% of what it has sold.

“We hope to reach 100% one day, but there are some challenges. For example, there are some machines or cartridges that you can’t track down and take back,” said Lee.

About 22% of the old machines (including those not made by Ricoh but used in its offices or factories) are reused. The rest, along with toner cartridges and bottles, and used parts, are sent to a recycling plant in Malacca.

“This is a proper recycling centre which will process these items accordingly. In some recycling centres, they will keep what’s needed and throw the rest away,” said Lee.

He said almost everything can be recycled in a machine. “(The recycling centre) will remove the metal, copper, aluminium, stainless steel parts including printed circuit boards from the machines.”

The boards will be crushed, and the gold removed, while the metal parts will be smelted.

“After all that is done, there will be a small amount left over. This will be incinerated. Less than 5% of the waste goes to the landfill,” said Lee.

Toner cartridges and bottles will first have the ink vacuumed out, then shredded and reduced to plastic pellets which are sold to be made into plastic items.

The company hopes there will come a time when it can emulate its counterpart in Australia which recycles used toner cartridges into useful items such as the “green bench”, rulers and dustbins. “But right now the volume (collected in Malaysia) is too small,” said Lee. “It would probably take us a year to collect enough used toner cartridges to produce one bench.”

Nevertheless, the company believes it has made a mark in conserving resources, reducing harmful waste to landfills and

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educating people, with its efforts.

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