

Consider this: In 2022 alone, 5.3 billion mobile phones will be thrown away worldwide (BBC), most of these devices could be repaired, reused, or recycled. But instead, they pile up in landfills, where their toxic components leach into the soil and groundwater. In 2022, an estimated 62 million metric tons of e-waste were generated globally. Only 22.3% was documented as formally collected and recycled, according to the WHO (World Health Organization).

This isn't just an environmental issue, it's an economic one. A 2023 report by U.S. PIRG found that American households could save \$40 billion per year if they had the option to repair instead of replace their electronics. Instead, many families are forced to spend hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars every few years because repair options are restricted or non-existent. To fight back, a movement has emerged: the right to repair. Essentially, the right to repair demands that manufacturers provide consumers and independent repair shops with tools, parts, and information to fix their own devices. It's about taking back control in a technology-driven world. In the same way car owners assume access to mechanics and manuals, electronic consumers should also have the freedom to keep their devices functional and extend their lifespan.

Nevertheless, industry pushback is intense. Tech giants like Apple and John Deere have lobbied against right-to-repair legislation for years, stating safety and intellectual property concerns. Critics, however, contend that such grievances are thinly veiled attempts to maintain monopolies on the repair economy. In practice, avoiding repair access is a strategy to enforce dependence, keeping customers coming back, not because the product is superior, but because there is no alternative.

The tide is shifting, however. In 2023, the European Union voted in a law mandating improved repairability and availability of spare parts for household appliances (European Commission). In America, New York signed the first state right-to-repair law into action, although its effects were diluted by last-minute amendments. California, Minnesota, and over 20 other states are now considering similar legislation.

However, the fight for the right to repair is a cultural one as much as a legal one. We have been conditioned for decades to view newness as advancement and repair as outdated. Sustainability has become an afterthought as convenience has been weaponized. As one repair advocate put it, "We've gone from a nation of fixers to a society of tossers."

In a metaphorical sense, our economy is like a treadmill on which people run incessantly but never get anywhere. They buy, break, and rebuy because that is how the system was designed. not because they are bad stewards. The right to repair challenges this design, calling for a shift from linear consumption to circular sustainability, where products are made to last, be fixed, and reused.

There's also a social justice dimension. Planned obsolescence disproportionately affects low-income and marginalized communities, where buying new every few years is simply not feasible. It creates a digital divide, where the ability to participate in modern life—from education to employment—depends on the ability to afford ever-new technology. Ensuring access to repair is thus a step toward technological equity.

What can we do, then? Let's start with your routine. Don't automatically throw away your laptop or phone the next time the screen cracks. Consult online resources or nearby repair shops.

Encourage businesses that provide spare parts and design for longevity. Instead of purchasing new, think about purchasing refurbished. Above all, contact your legislators and ask them to support state legislation granting the right to repair. We regain control, cut waste, and challenge a system based on needless consumption when we decide to fix rather than throw away. We need to replace our disposable culture with one that prioritizes sustainability, responsibility, and genuine innovation.