

Families count the costs as big tech fails to offer cheap phone, laptop and fridge repairs

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Each year 50 million tons [of electronic and electrical waste](#) is produced globally. A big part of this waste results from "product obsolescence"—the term used for phones, computers, fridges and other

goods becoming unusable because they are too difficult or expensive to repair.

Companies drive down their costs by using easily accessible and cheaper materials and restricting software updates on computers and phones as they get older. [Apple](#), [Microsoft](#) and other electric and electronics firms also continue to sell products that have [short lifespans](#) by making parts and repairs costly.

In California, where a right-to-repair law is being introduced, it's estimated that families could save [US\\$330 per year](#) (£243) on being able to repair rather than replace electronics.

Right-to-repair laws have been or are also being passed around the world, in [Australia](#), the [EU](#), [France](#), [UK](#) and the US states of [Massachusetts](#) and [New York](#). But these laws do not go far enough.

Most of these recently introduced laws cover domestic electronic devices such as washing machines and fridges, but only France's law covers devices such as smartphones and laptops.

So far, smartphone and laptop manufacturers have done little to react to the environmental waste problem. Apple, for example, only launched a self-service repair program after years of consumer and [legal pressures](#). There are examples of [small-scale initiatives](#) by companies that allow consumers to repair or upgrade their smartphones, but these need to be established more widely.

The requirement to provide spare parts for the first time should, in theory, prolong the life of appliances and reduce the need for new products. But, of course, this will conflict with companies' imperative to continue to increase profits. What is disappointing is that the current laws don't give consumers the right to have all products repaired.

(Depending on the law, tech firms are only obliged to offer information on products that are easier to fix, spare parts or advice on repairs.) Some right-to-repair regulations also fall short in that they put too many hurdles in consumers' way, including restrictions on [who may repair](#) the product, and that it does not address [pricing of repairs](#).

Electronic waste is bad for the [environment](#), and is also at odds with many law and policy aims that exist on, for example, [zero waste](#) and [circular economies](#) (moving towards the reuse of products, rather than throwing them away).

To make the right to repair more accessible and avoid further mountains of waste, tech companies can do far more, including:

1. Repairs must be faster

Sometimes firms are too slow with repairing products, causing people to throw them out. Some of the time frame requirements under the right-to-repair laws to repair devices are also impractical for people who may need a product urgently. For example, under EU law the delivery of [spare parts](#) for refrigerators has to be [within 15 working days](#). Consumers are more likely to replace a refrigerator than wait 15 days while food in their fridge or freezer is decaying.

2. Spare parts must be cheaper

Spare parts need to be more affordable and easier to get hold of. Manufacturers could take a leaf out of the automotive sectors' book where many new and reconditioned parts are made available to consumers in an [established market](#).

3. Access to spare parts must not be limited

The UK's [right-to-repair regulations](#), for example, set out that [professional repairers](#) should have access to parts rather than consumers, which will add labor cost to the price of repairs, which might sometimes be easy for customers to do themselves. There is not much point in the right to repair if it remains much cheaper to replace a broken product rather than to fix it.

4. Products must be designed for repair

Technology and electronics companies need different business models to move customers and retailers away from a throwaway culture, where it is easier and cheaper to buy new than repair. Products also need to be designed to [allow for repair](#). This needs to be supported by a supply chain that moves products from customers back to manufacturers or sellers for repairs.

5. Consumers must be given more information

Constantly upgrading to the next new phone or television has become an [accepted](#) way of life for many people. If people are to change their behavior, tech and domestic appliance companies need to promote awareness of repair options, the benefits of repair, and how to go about repairing (for example, providing an easily accessible list of professional repairers).

The first steps have been taken on the right-to-[repair](#) journey, but there is still a long way to go. Laws need to be tightened and tech and electronics companies must do more to break established consumption and production patterns.

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