



Zero Waste Institute Newsletter

November 2009

**The following article appeared in a BBC newspaper on
October 23, 2009**



A new mobile phone charger that will work with any handset has been approved by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a United Nations body.

The GSMA, an industry body, says that 51,000 tonnes of redundant chargers are generated each year.

Currently most chargers are product or brand specific, so people tend to change them when they upgrade to a new phone. However, the new energy-efficient chargers can be kept for much longer. The GSMA also estimates that they will reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by 13.6m tonnes.

"This is a significant step in reducing the environmental impact of mobile charging," said Malcolm Johnson, director of ITU's Telecommunication Standardisation Bureau. "Universal chargers are a common-sense solution that I look forward to seeing in other areas."

The charger has a micro-USB port at the connecting end, using similar technology to digital cameras. It is not compulsory for manufacturers to adopt the new chargers but the ITU says that some have already signed up to it.

"We are planning to launch the universal charger internationally during the first half of 2010," Aldo Liguori, spokesperson for Sony Ericsson told the BBC.

"We will roll it out with new products as they launch."

This is a very interesting report from the Zero Waste point of view. Think about it. Fifty one thousand tons of resources will no longer be mined or extracted from the earth, the users of the chargers will have a better product that they can use for a much longer time without spending money unnecessarily and yet the users will never have to worry about how to dispose of anything in a better way than before. There will be no picking out the purple or green or grey can to put anything into in order to save these resources. Recycling plays no role. The trick is accomplished by applying a basic Zero Waste principle - standardization! All that was needed to accomplish this miracle was to design a product intelligently instead of foolishly and wastefully. All that was needed was to design discard OUT of the product and design reuse INTO the product. This is the way that all of Zero Waste works.

When you look into it, you will discover that all products in commercial use today have this potential. They all have unspecified parameters that can be used for improving the design so that they can be reused over and over - without discard. Or, another way to say the same thing - from a resource conservation viewpoint, they are all mis-designed so as to waste the resources that they embody. Those resources are far more than merely their materials. Those resources include energy, human labor, capital and assembly. Also the soil, water and air that were degraded as the product was worked on, possible pollution that was created and species that were destroyed in the search for new sources of the resources that were scheduled to be used once and then discarded.

Zero Waste analysis addresses the reuse of the *function* of products, not their materials. Even if you reuse all the materials in a smashed product and prevent them from going into a dump, you have still failed to reuse the most valuable and most significant resources embodied in any constructed product - its function. You have still wasted most of the contained, embodied and implied resource content. All of the so-called Zero Waste programs that say to just recycle more, are misleading.

We don't need any more recycling - we need to start redesigning society to eliminate discard. Like they did with these chargers.

Now that the most foolish waste of these chargers is slated to be eliminated, namely the waste that is forced by discarding one every time the phone changes, we still have lots of work to do with them. We still have to redesign them mechanically and electronically so that they will last forever. But that will be the subject of another newsletter.

Join the Zero Waste Institute and help to support this kind of progressive thinking. Go to our website at www.zerowasteinstitute.org and sign up to join and contribute. There is no other organization in the country trying to do this work. If you want to move resource conservation into the twenty-first century, the Zero Waste Institute is the first and most important group. Help us to maintain our website, to create more newsletters, to support design projects, to create awards, to support interns and more.

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