# Right to Repair gains legal traction as consumers fight e-waste crisis



The Right to Repair movement has gained momentum as consumers increasingly seek to reclaim control over their broken or obsolete technology. This initiative strives not only to dismantle the barriers erected by manufacturers but also to promote sustainable practices that extend the lifecycle of products. With the world generating an unprecedented amount of electronic waste—14 million tonnes in 2022 alone—this campaign is more critical than ever.

Designed to address the growing issue of planned obsolescence, the Right to Repair movement champions easy repairs through better product design, accessibility to spare parts, and clear guidance for consumers. Manufacturers, often motivated by profitability, have created products that are intentionally difficult to repair. This trend results in an influx of discarded electronics filling landfills, while the European Parliament pointedly reported that approximately 18 million tonnes of e-waste were inadequately managed in low-income regions.

The movement garners support from a diverse coalition, including tech activists, independent repair businesses, and grassroots organisations, reflecting a broad concern for environmental sustainability. This coalition's advocacy echoes the sentiment that consumers should have the right to extend their product's lifecycle through repairs rather than replacements.

Recent legislative strides echo the movement's goals. The European Union adopted a directive aimed at promoting the repair of goods, wherein manufacturers are required to provide reasonable access to spare parts and information necessary for repairs. This legislation is a part of a broader effort to curb waste, making it easier for consumers to choose repairs over replacements. By 2023, this directive empowers consumers to claim repairs for products deemed technically repairable, like household appliances and electronics.

In the UK, the government introduced similar Right to Repair regulations, mandating that manufacturers and importers make spare parts available to both professional repairers and consumers. This initiative specifically targets household appliances, which represent a significant portion of e-waste. Such legislative efforts underline a growing recognition that sustainable choices must be embedded in consumer rights.

Meanwhile, states across the US are more actively joining the movement. For instance, California and New York have enacted laws requiring manufacturers to provide repair resources for consumer electronics. These laws empower individuals, ensuring that they have the necessary parts and knowledge to maintain their devices without relying solely on manufacturers’ services.

In an attempt to foster a culture of repair, platforms like iFixit offer comprehensive guides and part sales, enabling consumers to tackle repairs themselves. This kind of community support is crucial for educating consumers about their rights and promoting a shift in perspective regarding ownership and responsibility towards electronic goods.

Moreover, choosing second-hand products is an impactful choice for sustainable consumption. Purchasing pre-owned electronics not only saves money but reduces e-waste significantly. Companies such as Fairphone and Framework are addressing this need by manufacturing modular, repairable devices, underscoring a commitment to sustainability throughout the product lifecycle.

Ultimately, the Right to Repair movement is not just a consumer rights issue; it speaks to deeper environmental responsibilities. As consumers become aware of their capacity to influence market behaviors through their purchasing choices, the momentum for repair over replacement grows. Each repair is a step towards a more sustainable future, a tangible act against the tide of e-waste overwhelming our planet.

Investing in sustainable practices, voting for pro-environment policies, and supporting organisations dedicated to environmental advocacy are all pivotal ways individuals can contribute to enhancing the planet’s health. In engaging with the Right to Repair movement, consumers are not only preserving their own rights but also making a significant investment in the future of our environment.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1, 2, 3
2. Paragraph 2, 3
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 6, 7, 8

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2. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/policywatch-billions-dollars-materials-being-squandered-e-waste-mountain-says-un-2024-04-29/> - A United Nations initiative highlights the environmental impact of electronic waste (e-waste), emphasizing the loss of valuable materials and the need for effective legislation to address the issue. The article discusses the rapid growth of e-waste, its environmental consequences, and the importance of recycling and legislative measures to mitigate the problem.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/eu-parliament-approves-rules-requiring-companies-repair-worn-out-products-2024-04-23/> - The European Parliament has approved new regulations granting consumers the right to repair worn-out products, such as washing machines and smartphones, aiming to reduce waste and extend product lifespans. The policy mandates manufacturers to offer repair services for products deemed 'repairable' under EU law, with consumers entitled to repairs or replacements during the warranty period and extended warranties for repaired items.
4. <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-right-to-repair-aims-to-shrink-e-waste-pile/a-69165311> - The European Union's Right to Repair Directive seeks to encourage repairs and reduce e-waste by requiring manufacturers to provide reasonably priced spare parts and prohibit repair barriers. The directive applies to products like washing machines, dryers, vacuum cleaners, and smartphones, ensuring that repaired items receive a 12-month warranty extension and that manufacturers offer repairs even after the warranty period.
5. <https://www.ncsl.org/technology-and-communication/right-to-repair-2023-legislation> - An overview of right-to-repair legislation enacted in 2023 across various U.S. states, including Colorado, California, New York, and Minnesota. The article details the specific requirements of each state's law, such as manufacturers providing repair resources for agricultural equipment in Colorado and making parts and tools available for consumer electronics in California, New York, and Minnesota.
6. <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/news-and-stories/eco-living-right-to-repair> - Minnesota's Digital Fair Repair Act, effective July 1, 2024, empowers consumers to repair and maintain their electronic devices by requiring manufacturers to provide necessary parts, tools, and documentation. The law aims to reduce electronic waste and promote sustainability by making repairs more accessible and affordable for Minnesotans.
7. <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/tort_trial_insurance_practice/resources/journal/2024-spring/fixing-circles-right-repair-circular-economy/> - An article discussing the intersection of the right-to-repair movement and the circular economy, highlighting legislative efforts in the U.S. and the EU to promote repairability and sustainability. It emphasizes the role of repair in reducing electronic waste and the need for environmental accountability and regulation to protect the planet and its people.