



How can I ensure my IT equipment is ethical?

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Source: [The Guardian](#)

By Lucy Siegle

We need to be more ambitious if we are to reform the supply chain through which our laptops and smartphones are brought to us.

Assuming that you are permitted a lunch hour - unlike those on the assembly line for our electronic equipment routinely working an 84-hour week and sleeping in packed dormitories - try buying lunch for your IT person. There's plenty to chat about when it comes to the supply chain including poverty wages, forced overtime, unsafe working conditions, health hazards of fumes and the use of dangerous chemicals, which are especially concentrated in the semiconductor industry (where 500-1,000 chemicals are used). After high-profile exposés of Foxconn including China Labor Watch's report "[Beyond Foxconn: Deplorable Working Conditions Characterise Apple's Entire Supply Chain](#)", it would be strange if they hadn't heard about skeletons in the IT cupboard.

More likely, they'll think the issues too entrenched to sort out, especially when it comes to conflict minerals like coltan from the Congo, used in just about every device. The late Steve Jobs gave many smartphone addicts an ethical free pass when he said: "Until someone invents a way to chemically trace minerals from the source mine, it's a very difficult problem." Fortunately organisations such as the [Enough Project](#) have bigger ambitions than preserving the murderous status quo. It has always insisted that tracing minerals is possible by following raw mineral ores to the smelter where they were processed. The organisation has made its point. Earlier this month, [Apple even published the name of its smelters](#), dropping four that refused to comply with audits.

But with the exception of niche products such as the [Fairphone](#), no brand can claim to have socially sustainable conditions. Supplier reform is the only route. Take inspiration from [Electronics Watch](#), which pushes socially responsible public procurement of IT equipment. According to EU law the public purse should not be spent on products that contravene environmental rules or violate workers' rights in the global supply chain.

Or spend your lunchtimes loudly playing [Phone Story](#). The game takes you through the dark side of tech: the mining of rare earth minerals in central Africa, the threat of mass worker suicide in assembly factories and finally the device as toxic e-waste. [Apple banished](#) this "playable parody" from its App Store in 2011. I can't think why.

Green crush

Living without grid electricity in the depths of a wood sounds like a gritty existence. But Rupert McKelvie's Out of the Valley eco-cabin is designed with the sort of luxurious touches which mean you'll never want to leave. Originally trained in wooden boat building, McKelvie wanted to capture the magic of turning a pile of wood into a seafaring vessel. "For me, the same applies to cabins," he says. His first beautifully crafted eco-cabin is tucked away in a patch of Devon woodland and available for holiday stays. The outside is clad in cedar, charred to make it as hardwearing as possible, with locally sourced English ash for the interior. Discreet solar panels and a cosy wood burner take it off-grid but there's nothing hairshirt about this existence ([outofthevalley.co.uk](#)).

Greenspeak: slow cargo {slohe ka:rgoe} noun

Imagine a world where consumables are shipped by ketch (double-masted sailboat), rather than container ships guzzling tons of fuel. Far-fetched? Pioneers say slow sailing ships are the green future.