



Gaming a real-world problem

MRW tries out Currys' recycling video game *Trash Tycoon*, as research suggests the UK will become the world's largest contributor of WEEE

For those passionate about increasing recycling rates, as well as battling strangers for supremacy in a hostile island environment, most household waste and recycling centres do open on the weekends. But, with increasingly strained council budgets threatening local services, there is a virtual alternative.

Last month, the electrical retailer Currys, supported by Defra, launched the game *Trash Tycoon*, in which players can earn rewards for recycling virtual waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE). Set in the popular battle game *Fortnite*, players are given a mission to collect as much trash as they can to build bases.

"As the UK's largest tech retailer, we know people, particularly Gen Z, want to recycle their old tech but there is a lack of knowledge of how to do so responsibly," says Moira Thomas, director of sustainability at Currys.

"That's why we're confident *Trash Tycoon* will break down barriers, helping people to better understand the issue of WEEE in a language they can relate [to], and take inspiration from the hugely popular *Fortnite*."

The game's launch came just weeks after the Government announced plans to introduce household collections as part of major reforms to WEEE regulations. Environment minister Robbie Moore says: "I hope tackling e-waste in the virtual world can help younger generations to understand the importance of responsible waste disposal in the real world".

Rumours from Westminster suggest environment secretary Steve Barclay recused himself from the virtual recycling portfolio after the

Mario Brothers gained approval for a MRF in Cambridgeshire. Unable to think of an excuse of its own, *MRW* dived into the *Fortnite* omniverse.

Arriving on an island designed as a visual representation of the 880 million WEEE items hoarded in UK homes, our virtual character finds herself surrounded by piles of giant smartphones, tablets, gaming controllers and keyboards, looking out to an ocean horizon littered with discarded fridge-bergs.

On the largest screen reads the instructions: 'Stop the UK from becoming the world's biggest tech trash polluter!'. Currys says that recent surveys suggest the UK will become the world's largest contributor of WEEE per capita by the end of the year. "Not if I have anything to do with it," resolves our hero, striding forward wielding a pick-axe (for some reason).

A 'cash for trash' reverse vending machine suddenly appears before her as the words 'go into the world and pickaxe e-waste' appear on the screen, setting up this dystopian deposit return scheme with a thrilling disregard for the Internal Markets Act.

Approaching the first pile of WEEE, she swings her pickaxe – now realising it's a play on the concept of urban mining – and the trash disappears into her backpack. But as the character steps tentatively forward, the waste immediately reappears beneath her feet, glitching her to the spot – perhaps a play on the frustrations of the recycling sector.

Ignoring the dangers of the lithium-ion batteries all around, she tries to shoot her way out

(somehow she now has a gun), before reverting to the trusty pick-axe. After taking a few potshots at electric kettles, she heads back to the vending machine for her rewards.

Currys says its research has shown that 44% of Gen Z would recycle more if given a cash incentive, finding that more than a third are put off recycling WEEE due to a lack of knowledge. While it's not clear how swinging a virtual axe at a microwave will make players better informed, radio presenter and DJ Tyler West certainly believes *Trash Tycoon* is a "game changer".

"As a *Fortnite* fan, it's refreshing to play a map that addresses real-world issues. It's about time we turn gaming into a force for good. I can't wait to dive in with my squad and see how I can level up my base, while recycling tech trash."

Players can compete to win more than £1,000-worth of real prizes. In the game, their rewards can be used to buy everything from flat screen TVs to sofas but, after a few more laps of the WEEE world, our adventurer grows weary. Presumably, the mission ends with our character teaming with Hypnocat to fight a horde of disposable vapes. There is simply no way of knowing without playing the game a bit longer.

Throughout *Trash Tycoon*, players are reminded that 60,000 tonnes of tech trash is produced every 'fortnite'. Here's hoping this unique approach encourages younger people to recycle their WEEE. The experience has certainly made me want to use my devices a lot less. 🌱

Dystopian deposit scheme: characters prowl the digital world in search of WEEE to battle against

