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# He@lth Information on the Internet

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## Editorial: Green computing

Sue Childs, Editor

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*'Green computing' has been coined to describe the study and practice of using computing resources efficiently.*

Environmental problems have serious health impacts. A recent *BMJ* editorial on the economics of climate change states: 'Don't leave health benefits out of the equation'.<sup>1</sup>

The UK Government has also considered this issue.<sup>2,3</sup> The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology's summary<sup>2</sup> notes that the health impacts of climate change include: the effects of extremes of temperature, particularly heatwaves; the physical and mental effects of flooding; exposure to higher levels of UV; increases in vector-borne diseases and the introduction of new diseases to the UK; increased food poisoning in hotter weather; increased water-borne diseases, plus increased risks of contamination of the water supply by severe storms and flooding; injuries and deaths during severe storms; and increased air pollution.

Computer use is not immune to the demand for us to change our behaviour and contribute to tackling climate change. People have coined the phrase 'green computing' – 'Green computing is the study

and practice of using computing resources efficiently'.<sup>4</sup> As with use of any consumer product, green computing would entail:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Design and use of modern hardware that is energy efficient, does not use hazardous or rare materials, and is recyclable or biodegradable;*
2. *Organisational policies and user-behaviour changes, e.g. to conserve energy (turn equipment off when not in use) and to save on paper (don't print that email!);*
3. *Re-use or repair of older equipment;*
4. *Responsible disposal and recycling of discarded equipment.*

However, another aspect of the issue is how can ICTs be used to cut

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Information, Knowledge and  
Systems Research Group

'Up to two million PCs were left on between [2006/7] Christmas and the New Year break, creating unnecessary energy costs amounting to £3.1m'.

'More than £1bn a year is wasted across UK Government and industry through inefficient business printing'.

'As many as 10 million computers could be discarded over the next two years in the UK alone' as companies upgrade to Microsoft Vista.

'The IT industry is responsible for creating 2% of the world's carbon emissions'.<sup>6</sup>

an organisation's carbon footprint? And an obvious example is the use of video-conferencing and internet forums in place of face-to-face meetings, particularly meetings requiring long-distance travel.

But is ICT use really an environmental problem? A recent article<sup>6</sup> gives some figures (see boxed text).

The Register held a live, interactive debate<sup>7</sup> on green computing – 'hype or heaven?' – on 27 February 2008. The output of the debate will be made available on The Register's website.

Whatever your views on the reality of climate change, I think that we should, on principle, not be profligate and we should treat the world and its resources with respect. It is, after all, to our own benefit!

## References

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## Information behaviour of the researcher of the future

[www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/reppres/gg\\_final\\_keynote\\_11012008.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/reppres/gg_final_keynote_11012008.pdf)

'This study was commissioned by the British Library and JISC to identify how the specialist researchers of the future, currently in their school or pre-school years, are likely to access and interact with digital resources in five to ten years' time. ... In this report, we define the "Google generation" as those born after 1993 and explore the world of a cohort of young people with little or no recollection of life before the web.' The study was carried out by the CIBER research team at UCL, who found that 'although young people demonstrate an ease and familiarity with computers, they rely on the most basic search tools and do not possess the critical and analytical skills to assess the information that they find on the web'.

[www.jisc.ac.uk/news/stories/2008/01/googlegen.aspx](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/stories/2008/01/googlegen.aspx).

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