Problem of disposing of PCs

Microsoft Vista could have serious environmental implications, experts have warned. The latest version of Windows uses encryption methods that are incompatible with some older PCs. It also features high-end graphics capabilities that can only run on newer hardware. And vendor Softchoice estimates that fewer than half of business PCs will be able to run Vista.

Computer Aid International, which refurbishes old PCs for use in the developing world, estimates the UK will discard some 10 million PCs over the next two years because they cannot take advantage of all Vista features.

Zeena Alhajj, Greenpeace International Campaigns Co-ordinator, says Vista will put added strain on an already stretched e-waste recycling industry coping with the WEEE directive. ‘E-waste is already beyond the capacity of recycling, which is why an illegal trade in e-waste has developed,’ she said. ‘Hardware changes because of Vista will compound the problem.’

Tony Roberts, Chief Executive of Computer Aid, is concerned that many redundant PCs will end up in landfill sites. ‘The danger is that some of these e-waste traders will only pay lip-service to the environment, and many computers will be dumped in landfill sites,’ he said.