

## Shaking it up

Statistics from Europe show that presently over 90% of redundant electrical and electronic equipment goes into landfill sites. This is about 6 million tones of waste every year. Seepage and emissions to the air from the landfill are a risk to both health and the environment. A greater range of electrical and electronic products with a shorter life cycle have become affordable and it is now essential that something is done about environmental and health issues when disposing of these products. The European Union has put into legislation directives regarding the production and disposal of electrical and electronic equipment. The RoHS (Restriction Of Hazardous Substances in Electrical and Electronic Equipment) directive will come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2006.

Simply put this means that manufacturers and suppliers of equipment sold in the European Union will have to ensure that the equipment complies with the ROHS directive. The ROHS directive stipulates that hazardous materials are no longer used in manufactured equipment. There are six harmful substances that have been targeted. One of the main materials targeted is lead which has traditionally been used in the electrical/electronic manufacturing process for decades.

For electronic equipment manufacturers to comply with the ROHS directive they will need to use new lead free components in their production processes and will need to revise their manufacturing methods for new products released to the market after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2006.

As well of the costs of redesigning products, components and changing manufacturing methods companies will have to set up compliance certification for their products. This should not only certify that the finished product is compliant with ROHS but that they have also taken steps to ensure that components sourced from suppliers and used in their products are compliant.

So far legislation has only been introduced in the European Union, but other countries are expected to introduce similar legislation in the future.

At present there does not appear to be any moves in Australia to introduce ROHS legislation but it is probably only a matter of time before some sort of guidelines are introduced as we can already see the concerns caused by the disposal of mobile phones and their effect on the environment. With audio/visual, home entertainment, PC's and POS systems few companies manufacture solely for the Australian market so the ROHS compliance will probably happen by stealth anyway.

One of the areas of direct interest to the hospitality industry that could possibly be affected is in the manufacture and supply of POS systems. Companies such as Uniwell Corporation in Japan who specialize in POS hospitality systems tell us they started planning for ROHS in 2004 and expect to have their first ROHS compliant products available late in 2005, well before the legislation comes into law in Europe. Large corporations that have seen their market share eroded by the advent of PC's into traditional POS applications, may decide that for a declining market share, it will not be worth the expense of restructuring manufacture and setting up compliance procedures for POS systems, and instead concentrate on growth areas of their business such as multimedia and home entertainment into developing countries like China.

For most of us it has been a natural tendency to thoughtlessly throw an unwanted appliance into the rubbish bin, but it's now time we started taking more interest in our health and environment and the next few years should see some interesting changes in the electronics industry.

