

Information Note

Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative

Background

The use of mobile phones has grown exponentially from the first few users in the 1970s, to 1.76 billion in 2004, and more than 3 billion in April 2008¹. Sooner or later, these phones will be discarded, whole or in parts. In developed countries this quite often takes place sooner before they cease to operate. According to some recent studies, the first owner will generally replace their mobile phone within two years because they want newer features or because the older phones are incompatible with new services. In addition mobile phones are rapidly replacing fixed line phones in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The result of that growth is a waste management problem when such phones reach the ends of their lives.

Mobile Phone Evolution

The first generation of truly portable phones was large and heavy; they contained lead-acid batteries, came with carrying bags with shoulder straps and weighed upwards of 5 kg. These devices, however, progressed steadily to smaller, lighter models in the late 1980s, and today mobile phone handsets typically weigh less than 100 grams and are powered by a small battery. In addition the mobile phone industry quickly phased out lead acid batteries. These were replaced by nickel metal hydride (NiMH), and more recently by lithium ion (Li-ion). These newer technologies are delivering far superior performance, including increases in the standby time from about 4 hours to 10 days or more.

The issue of wastes from discarded mobile phones is, therefore, a significant one due to their sheer quantity globally and the possibility of pollution as well as the loss of valuable resources (one tonne of recycled phones can generate up to 230 grams of gold)². The GSM Association reports that take-back operations can now be found in

more than 40 countries – all started as voluntary initiatives. But with global sales of new handsets approaching 1 billion handsets per year, the organizational problems can be huge.

The Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative

In 2002 the Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative (MPPI) was launched, during the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention, when 12 manufacturers signed a Declaration entering into sustainable partnership, with the Basel Convention and in cooperation with other stakeholders, to develop and promote the environmentally sound management of end-of-life mobile phones. In addition three telecom operators also signed a Declaration entering into sustainable partnership in July, 2005.

The overall objective of the MPPI Work Programme, which involved many stakeholders besides the partners, was to promote the objectives of the Convention in the area of the environmentally sound management of end-of-life mobile phones.

In particular, the MPPI Work Programme was developed to:

- Achieve better product stewardship;
- Influence consumer behaviour towards more environmentally friendly actions;
- Promote the best refurbishing/recycling/disposal options;
- Mobilise political and institutional support for environmentally sound management;
- Result in an initiative that could be replicated to build new public/private partnerships for the environmentally sound management of hazardous and other waste streams.

1 http://www.gsmworld.com/news/press_2008/press08_31.shtml

2 P.8 in <http://www.gsmworld.com/health/wireless/lifecycle.shtml>

Success Of The MPPI and Follow-Up

- Under the MPPI five technical guidelines (awareness raising on design considerations, collection of used and end-of-life mobile phones, transboundary movement of collected mobile phones, refurbishment of used mobile phones, and material recovery/recycling of end-of-life mobile phones) were developed. All these guidelines have been tested in a facility type environment and are being revised accordingly.
- In addition an overall Guidance Document was prepared, which contains summaries and recommendations, taken from all five technical guidelines. It is being submitted to the ninth meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Basel Convention (COP 9) for final adoption.
- All five guidelines and the overall Guidance Document are now being used by Parties, BCRCs, industry, NGOs and other stakeholders in raising awareness on the environmentally sound management of used and end-of-life mobile phones. These are available at: <http://www.basel.int/industry/mppiwp/projects.html>.
- The Mobile Phone working group (MPWG) reviewed the MPPI, Decisions of VI/32, VII/4, VIII/6 and the Declaration signed by industry partners in 2002, and felt that the group completed all the tasks as assigned and met its objectives successfully. As such the MPWG decided to cease its operation, and all remaining tasks post COP 9 will be carried out as part of ad-hoc forums known as the Partnership Updates on Mobile Phones with participation by interested Parties, Signatories, industry and non governmental organizations.
- The benefits of the MPPI can be summarized as follows:
 - Consumers should have confidence that re-sold phones processed in accordance with the guidelines are of a satisfactory standard with respect to product safety, quality, longevity and environmental performance.
 - Manufacturers should have confidence that both importers & local reprocessors are aware of the best practices with respect to refurbishment, materials recycling, transboundary movements, and implement these for products they manufactured.
 - International organizations, such as UNEP, benefit by the fact that partnerships such as the MPPI make concrete contribution to the implementation of sustainable development goals, outlined in environmental agreements such as the Basel Convention. It also contributes towards the implementation of Agenda 21, and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.
 - Partnerships like the MPPI complement government's initiatives to deliver on goals and objectives under various environmental agreements, while promoting cooperative sustainable and transparent working arrangements with all stakeholders.

All this could not come about without a strong dedication, financial and in-kind support by Parties, Signatories, industry and, NGOs, who have spent much of their time in regularly providing comments on documents circulated, taking part in scheduled teleconferences and attending physical meetings. In particular, the government of Switzerland should be recognized for taking the leadership role in the MPPI, chairing the Mobile Phone Working Group (MPWG) and providing significant financial resources to ensure that the work plan can be effectively implemented.

Lessons Learned and Prerequisites for Success

Valuable lessons were learned from the MPPI, which should be taken into account when setting up new public-private partnerships, to be undertaken by the Basel Convention. These include:

- Strong and continued leadership is crucial.
- All stakeholders need to be actively involved in the partnership from the beginning; transparency is of paramount importance.
- A self funding mechanism for the whole partnership must be agreed to at the beginning to ensure that resources are available for editing, translation and printing of guidelines; for organizing workshops in different regions to disseminate information on environmentally sound management of used and end-of-life mobile phones; and for pilot projects agreed to by the whole group.
- Balanced participation is required between developed and developing countries and between types of stakeholders and funds should be allocated for the participation of delegates and stakeholders from developing countries and countries with economies in transition. A better understanding of the Basel Convention as well as the perspectives and viewpoints of the various stakeholders should be sought at the beginning of the partnership to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Sound coordination of activities throughout the process is important.
- Successes of the initiative rests on finding committed officials (from key countries, the Secretariat and the private sector) to actively participate, and to lead projects.
- Mechanisms should be established for reaching consensus or resolving conflict among different interest groups at the beginning of the initiative.
- The work programme needs to be flexible and allow for adjustments along the way.
- There needs to be a mechanism for sending legal interpretive questions to the Parties for resolution, such as issues raised during the discussion of the transboundary movement of used and end-of-life mobile phones.

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MPPI Partners: Alcatel-Lucent³, LG, Matsushita (Panasonic), Mitsubishi, Motorola, NEC, Nokia, Philips, Samsung, Sharp, Siemens, Sony Ericsson, Bell Canada, Vodafone, and FranceTelecom/Orange.

3 Companies have merged.

