



Meeting the Challenge of E-Waste



The *Basel Convention* on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal is the most comprehensive global environmental agreement on hazardous and other wastes. It has over 160 Parties and aims to protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects resulting from the generation, management, transboundary movements and disposal of hazardous and other wastes.

The *Basel Convention* regulates the transboundary movements of hazardous and other wastes and obliges its Parties to ensure that such wastes are managed and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner. The Convention covers toxic, poisonous, explosive, corrosive, flammable, ecotoxic and infectious wastes. Parties are also expected to minimize the quantities that are transported, to treat and dispose of wastes as close as possible to their place of generation and to prevent or minimize the generation of wastes at source.

The *Basel Convention* has 14 Basel Convention Regional Centers in the following locations: Argentina, China, Egypt, El Salvador, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Senegal, Slovak Republic, South Pacific Regional Programme, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay. They deliver training and technology transfer for the implementation of the Convention.

The *Basel Convention* came into force in 1992.



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The Basel Convention's Activities on E-Waste

Electrical and electronic waste, E-waste, is covered in Annex VIII (entries A1180, A1150 and A210) and Annex IX (B1110) of the Basel Convention. E-waste is also a priority waste stream identified in the Basel Convention Strategic Plan (2000-2010) adopted at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention, under the Convention's approved Partnership Programme, and in the "Ministerial Statement on Partnerships for Meeting the Global Waste Challenge" adopted at the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention.

Why focus on E-waste?

- E-waste contains problematic substances such as lead, cadmium, beryllium, mercury or brominated flame retardants for example which can harm human health and the environment if they are not refurbished, recycled, or disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.
- E-waste grows at a rate of 3-5% per annum, three times more rapidly than the general waste stream.
- More and more E-waste ends in landfills and incinerators where it releases hazardous materials into the environment.
- Large quantities of E-waste are exported to countries where, due to a lack of environmental regulations and infrastructure, recovery facility workers and neighbouring residents are exposed to health risks and the environment to pollution hazards. This is of special concern to countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

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The Basel Convention has programmes in place dealing with E-waste at the global and regional levels

Global Level

Used or end-of-life mobile phones are among the fastest growing waste streams, the rate of increase is about 650 million units per annum. At the global level, the Basel Convention, following an initiative of the Swiss Government, identified mobile phones as a priority waste stream and created the "Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative" (MPPI) in 2002.

Signatories to the Basel Convention, Basel Convention Regional Centres, representatives of mobile phone manufacturers telecom operators and other concerned industries representatives of the Basel Convention Secretariat.

There are four project groups set up under the MPPI, namely mobile phone refurbishment; collection

and transboundary movement rules; material recovery and recycling; and design consideration. Each of the project groups has produced guidelines which form the basis of a recently agreed upon roadmap for the development and implementation of pilot projects on collection and sustainable treatment schemes for used and end-of-life mobile phones in rapidly industrialising and developing countries.

The Basel Convention has also initiated a Global Computer Refurbishment and Recycling Partnership called "e2e". It is aimed at engaging manufacturers and other companies dealing with elec-

tronic equipment to increase the reuse and recycling of personal computers-including circuit boards and components, keyboards, mice, printers, loud speakers, laptops and flat panels-to encourage the diver-



Photo Still Pictures

The MPPI, a unique public-private partnership, aims to improve the environmental friendliness of mobile phones, influence consumer behaviour and political institutions, and promote the sustainable and environmentally sound refurbishing and recycling of used and end-of-life mobile phones.

The MPPI membership is composed of experts from Parties and

tronic equipment to increase the reuse and recycling of personal computers-including circuit boards and components, keyboards, mice, printers, loud speakers, laptops and flat panels-to encourage the diver-

sion of such end-of-life equipment away from landfills. The Partnership is operated in close cooperation with UNEP and the United Nations University.

Regional Level

At the regional level, the Basel Convention has prepared a project on the "Environmentally Sound Management of Electrical and Electronic Waste in Asia and the Pacific"

The project is a four-year programme to address the critical issues associated with the rapid generation of E-waste and its consequences for the Asia-Pacific region.

The countries in Asia and the Pacific identified E-waste as a priority and emphasized the need to obtain the latest and relevant information on the environmentally sound management of E-waste, inclusive of information regarding know-how on cleaner technologies or processes used in the repair, refurbishment, recycling or recovery of used or end-of-life electrical and electronic equipment.

The project was developed by the Basel Convention in partnership with its Regional Centres in Asia and the Pacific (China, Indonesia, South Pacific Regional Environment Programme) with UNEP's Regional

Office for Asia and the Pacific and NGOs in the region.

The Basel Convention Regional Centre in China will play a key role in the coordination of the project with the support of the Basel Convention Regional Centre in Indonesia and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme.



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The programme aims to address the key obstacles to the environmentally sound management of E-waste.

Its aims are:

- To support national and local initiatives to divert end-of-life equipment from landfills towards sustainable reuse and recycling operations to protect human health and the environment.



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- To provide an assessment of the regional situation on E-waste, tools to develop national policies for re-use, repair, refurbishment and recycling and capacity building to implement these policies.
- A survey on imports and the environmentally sound management of E-waste in the Asia-Pacific Region.

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Recommendations on the establishment of facilities for the environmentally sound management of E-waste taking local specificities into consideration will also be prepared.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Centre for Hazardous Waste Management, Training and Technology Transfer - the Basel Convention Regional Centre in China- currently implements two projects on E-waste under the Basel Convention Strategic Plan:

- A partnership with local authorities for the environmentally sound management of E-waste in urban areas in the Asia-Pacific Region.

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